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Oedipus: The Religious Issue

BERT O. STATES:
Pinter's Homecoming

RICHARD STERN:
Milius and Melanie—a story

J. MITCHELL MORSE:
Masters and Innocents

CHARLES TOMLINSON:
Translations from Octavio Paz

Poems by W. S. MERWIN, LAURENCE LIEBERMAN, PHILIP LEVINE, EUGENIA PLUNKETT.

Articles and Reviews by GUY DAVENPORT, B. H. HAGGIN, VERNON YOUNG, ROGER SALE, JOHN SIMON, EARL MINER, CALVIN BEDIENT, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, HERBERT LEIBOWITZ.

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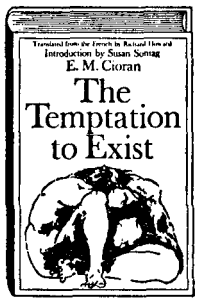

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Notes on Contributors

W. S. MERWIN's next contribution to this Review will be a group of translations from Jean Follain.

GEORGE DIMOCK is a Professor in the Department of Classical Languages and Literatures at Smith College.

OCTAVIO PAZ is the eminent Mexican poet. A collection of his poems, translated by CHARLES TOMLINSON, will be published next year by New Directions. Mr. Tomlinson has recently edited a book of essays on Marianne Moore, and is at present translating a selection of the poetry of Ungaretti.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Illinois. His first volume of poems, *The Unblinding*, was published by Macmillan in the Spring.

PHILIP LEVINE'S new book of poems, *Not This Pig*, was published by Wesleyan University Press this Spring.

EUGENIA PLUNKETT* grew up in the South, and studied at Radcliffe College and the University of Arkansas. She is currently living and working in the Boston area.

DOROTHY ROBERTS' most recent book of poems is *Extended* (University of New Brunswick, Canada).

BERT O. STATES teaches in the Department of English at Cornell University. He is completing a book on the theory of form in the drama.

RICHARD STERN* is at work on his sixth book of fiction.

ROGER SALE's *Reading Spencer* has just been published by Random House.

HERBERT LEIBOWITZ is at The Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois for the current academic year.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

(continued on page 552)

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir:

In reference to Mr. C. T. Samuels' blue-chinned, wildly swinging attack on *Bonnie and Clyde* and on anyone who had a good word to say for the film (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Spring 1968):
Good Heavens! The man is all over the place! The center of his argument is difficult to isolate. I have inferred five conclusions from his remarks.
1. He is confused, like Kracauer, as to whether film *expresses* the state of a nation or *shapes* it. (If the action is reciprocal, why revile the makers of *Bonnie and Clyde,* who can scarcely be said to have condoned that state?)
2. He identified himself with the characters, Bonnie and Clyde, then was furious that he had done so.
3. His sociology smells of the lamp, for he appears to be enviably ignorant of what actually goes on in the United States beyond the confines of the English Department of Williams College.
4. He has no feeling whatever for inventive film-making.
5. He is humorless.
I think *The New Yorker* (March 30, '68) had next-to-the-last-word on the subject. In a cartoon by Richter, a convict, reading the theatre ads evidently, complains bitterly to his cell mate. "Bonnie and Clyde, Bonnie and Clyde! I'm sick of it! It's the old story—you're never appreciated until after you're dead."

In Cold Blood,

VERNON YOUNG

Stockholm

Dear Sir:

I am enthralled by the typographer, who, in your Summer 1968 issue, has invented the exotic figure of "Maxine Du Camp." This transvestite lady-friend of Gustave Flaubert surely deserves further "rehabilitation," if not downright immortality. Perhaps, when he has sufficiently recovered from the attentions of a recent leading lady, Mr. Warhol might be persuaded to make a film-star of Maxine, capital D and all.

CAROLYN KIZER

Washington, D. C.

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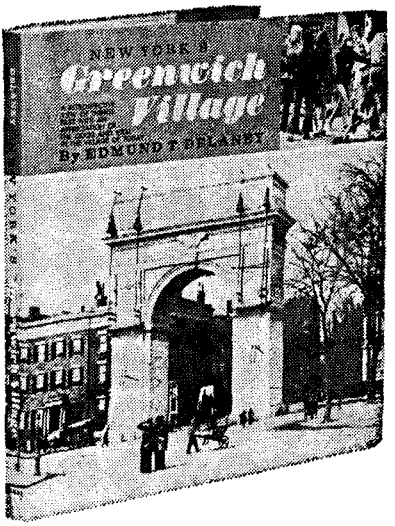

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W. S. MERWIN

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The president of shame has his own flag
the president of lies quotes the voice
of God
as last counted
the president of loyalty recommends
blindness to the blind
oh oh
applause like the heels of the hanged
he walks on eyes
until they break
then he rides
there is no president of grief
it is a kingdom
ancient absolute with no colors
its ruler is never seen
prayers look for him
also empty flags like skins
silence the messenger runs through the vast lands
with a black mouth
open
silence the climber falls from the cliffs
with a black mouth like
a call
there is only one subject
but he is repeated
tirelessly

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GEORGE DIMOCK

Oedipus: The Religious Issue

> The form which [the Oedipus fable] subsequently assumed was the result of an uncomprehending secondary elaboration of the material, which sought to make it serve a theological intention.
>
> —Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

I

THOUGH THERE IS NO EXTERNAL EVIDENCE for the date of *Oedipus the King*, it is almost certain that Sophocles wrote it in the midst of the great plague at Athens which first broke out in the second year of the Peloponnesian War.[1] The plague caused a religious crisis, and it looks very much as though it was to that crisis first and foremost that Sophocles' play was addressed.

The plague tended to shake the Athenians' faith in the gods in two ways: in the first place, as Thucydides says (2.53), "They judged that it made no difference whether one was god-fearing or not, since they saw that all died alike." So they did as they pleased. It was as though the gods didn't matter. In the second place, to believe in the gods was tantamount to believing that Athens would lose the war. Thucydides writes (2.54):

> Those who knew about it remembered also the oracle given to the Spartans. When they asked the god whether they should go to war, he replied that if they fought their hardest they would win, and he said that he would help them. As far as the oracle was concerned, men judged that events bore it out. The plague began immediately after the Peloponnesians invaded, and did not spread to the Peloponnesus to any degree worth speaking of. It attacked Athens most seriously, and after that the most heavily populated places.

As Diodorus also implies (12.58), the Athenians in general saw in the plague the manifest hand of Apollo, and to the thoughtful at least defeat cannot have seemed very far away.

Either there were no gods and there was no truth in prophecy,

[1] Bernard M. W. Knox, "The Date of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles," *American Journal of Philology*, 1956, pp. 133-47.

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in which case Athens might win; or the gods had decreed Athens' defeat. In this age of the sophists the impluse to accept the first alternative must have been strong, and in fact Thucydides like many others regarded the plague as a scientific rather than a religious phenomenon. He writes (2.47):

> Doctors did no good because at first they treated the sick without knowing how; and the more they attended their patients, the more they died themselves. No other human art helped either. As for supplications at shrines or consulations of oracles and the like, all were useless, and finally people stopped having recourse to such things, defeated by the plague.

For Thucydides the answer was clearly more and better science; religion was irrelevant if not downright false. Sophocles however believed just the opposite, that the plague was a divine manifestation and that any attempt to avoid that issue would be even more fatal than the plague or the defeat of Athens. In this conviction he wrote *Oedipus the King.*

The myth he chose for subject could not have suited his purpose better. As Homer tells the story in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey,* Oedipus is simply the man who in ignorance killed his father and married his mother "through the dread contrivings of the gods," (276) and who, after the secret was out and his mother-wife had killed herself, lived long in Thebes "suffering a mother's Furies" (280). Here is evil involuntarily committed and unavoidably suffered, for no man, no matter how corrupt, would choose to do these things; yet they happened. There is probably no clearer or more powerful statement in all mythology of the proposition that the gods, not we, are the masters of our fate, and this is what Sophocles wanted to tell the Athenians: that gods exist and control men's fate, and if they have planned Athens' destruction, this is not unthinkable, but rather to be accepted as inherent in the nature of god and man.

There was also a third point which Sophocles saw in this myth. Homer had said that the woman killed herself, but Oedipus lived on and suffered. Sophocles in his play proceeded to show how Oedipus found the strength to do it. The implication is that even if we cannot, finally, deliver ourselves from evil, we can live with the fact that we cannot. This was all the comfort he had for the Athenians; but if we take his play as he meant it, I think we shall find that it was enough.

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Sophocles was concerned to show the existence of the gods and their control over man's fate, but obviously he was not going to convince the sceptical Athenians merely by putting in front of them a myth which asserted these things. He had to do more, and what he did was to introduce a plague into the story, thereby alluding unmistakably to the contemporary Athenian situation; more than that, in the course of his play he demonstrated both philosophically and emotionally the existence of gods and their importance for men. As the play opened, the Athenian spectator found himself, no doubt to his surprise, witnessing a situation very like his own: a city in the throes of the pest, led by a great man. A "supplication at shrines" like those we have heard Thucydides speak of is on stage, and a "consultation of oracles," again as in Thucydides, has just taken place. And there is more: at the beginning of the war the Spartans, aiming at Pericles, had demanded that the Athenians "drive out the curse of the goddess," for one of his ancestors was implicated in a sacrilegious slaying (Thucydides 1.126-7). Now here on stage is Oedipus, leader of Thebes, faced with the demand to drive out a curse arising from a sacrilegious slaying of which he will turn out to be guilty. Can it be, the sceptical spectator might ask himself, that Sophocles is likening Oedipus' blood-guilt to the blood-guilt of Pericles' family, and can he believe that this sort of thing really causes plagues? Or is Sophocles drawing an analogy between Oedipus, who by doing his best incurred the worst, and Pericles, who by going to war for the very best of reasons has fallen foul of the incalculable, the plague, and perhaps brought himself and his people to destruction? These questions would soon fade, no doubt, before the interest of the unfolding plot, but they are important, and soon to be revived.

Sophocles' plague, then, emphasizes his play's relevance to real life. It remains to show how he comes to deal with the question of the existence of gods. He might have done this by pitting against them an atheistic or rationalistic Oedipus, but he did not do so. If he had, Oedipus by his hybristic unbelief would have seemed in some sense responsible for, and therefore in control of, his own fate; and it is just this notion of man controlling his own destiny that Sophocles was out to deny. Instead, Oedipus does not doubt the gods, but prophets and oracles only, and that never

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finally. Even when, as he thinks, two oracles have failed before his eyes, even when the father Delphi predicted he would kill is apparently dead of natural causes, he is still afraid that "Apollo will prove true" for him in the matter of marrying his mother (1011).

It is Jocasta, rather, who finally denies that there is any truth in prophecy. Because an oracle said her child would kill his father, she did away with her baby, as she thinks, only to lose her husband to another hand. Prophecy has killed her child for nothing. Now her second husband, Oedipus, is threatened with Delphi's prediction that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Is it any wonder that "judging the present by the past" (916) she tells him to pay no attention (857-8)? Though she does not presume so far as to doubt the gods completely (711-2; by "Loxias" in line 853 she presumably means the whole Delphic institution), she doubts the possibility of human prediction of the future (709), and this turns out to be enough to call all religion into question, as the chorus sees.

The chorus therefore undertakes to defend the gods. They make their point of departure, however, not Jocasta's doubts, but the question of Oedipus' guilt. Jocasta has mentioned "the place where three roads meet" and it is now all but certain that Oedipus is the murderer of Laius and the polluter of Thebes, the cause of the plague. He cries out (813-23):

> . . . If that stranger
> had anything to do with Laius,
> who is more wretched now than I who stand here,
> what man is more god-hated, whom
> by law no stranger and no citizen
> may take within his house, or speak a word to,
> but must thrust out of doors? And no one else
> but I myself upon myself pronounced this curse.
> I smirch the dead man's wife at night with these two
> arms
> by which he fell. Am I not evil?
> Am I not utterly impure?

With these words of Oedipus' ringing in their ears, the chorus begins its famous ode, "May my fate ever be with me keeping purity

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of word and deed." They are expressing how terrible it is to have committed acts like those they are afraid Oedipus has committed. Such acts, they believe, are wrong not by mere human convention, as stealing might be, but by divine ordinance. So they sing (863-72):

> May my fate ever be with me keeping
> god-fearing purity of all words and deeds,
> the laws of which stand manifest
> on high, firm-footed, brought to birth
> in the air of heaven. Olympus is
> their only father, nor did any
> mortal being of mankind
> beget them, nor will forgetfulness ever
> lull them to sleep.
> Mighty is god in them; he does not grow old.

What makes divinity so obvious in these laws? It is that every man knows that these things are wrong without having to be taught or told, both these things which Oedipus is afraid he has done, and those even worse things which he has just said he is afraid he yet may do, the murder of his father and the marriage with his mother (826). So strong and universal are these tabus, if that is what they are, that we cannot blame Sophocles for seeing in them an absolute, a more than human standard for human behavior, and so a law of "the gods."

There are gods, then, and they have laws. What happens when they are broken? As one may see in Herodotus, Sophocles and his contemporaries felt that the classic case of the transgression of divine laws was the case of the wicked tyrant or ruler. Shocking crime was felt to be, and no doubt was, far more prevalent among the rich and powerful than among the humble, and so was shocking retribution. Tyrants rose and fell by or amid violence to men and institutions. History offered many examples: Cyrus, Polycrates, Xerxes, to name only three. Not only the individual conscience, then, but history, seemed to suggest a universal law, a more than human, quasi-moral control of events. Accordingly the chorus in our play, having been powerfully reminded of the existence of divine law, sings next of its operation in history. That their own king may be a case in point, is implicit (873-82):

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Transgression breeds the tyrant; transgression, if
it fills itself with superabundance of many things,
things not seasonable, not good for it,
climbs the topmost height, then
falls the sheer, necessary drop
to where its feet are no use
to it. But the struggle
good for the city let god never
dissolve, I pray.
I shall always follow god in my politics.

If Oedipus has killed Laius, then like the tyrant in the ode he has gained his power by transgression. All his success is tainted, "not seasonable," and his fall, in Thebes at least, is inevitable. On the other hand there is a chance that he has not killed Laius, and the chorus remembering his intense public spirit and his great services is reminded that the state cannot do without such men and their willingness to rule. They pray that healthy ambition may continue. Still, if the issue is between the gods and Oedipus, and that is what it is if he has transgressed divine law by killing the former king, then there is no doubt where their choice must fall: "I shall always follow god in my politics."

For if Oedipus or any tyrant like him, whether his crimes are witting or unwitting, should go unpunished, what would be the result (883-96)?

If any walk a path
of heedlessness in act or word,
not fearing Retribution, nor
reverencing those who sit on high,
may an evil fate take him
for his cursed wantonness!
Unless he shall gain his gains justly,
and refrain from what is impious,
or if he shall lay his hands on what must not be touched,
what man then any longer where such things reign
can defend himself and ward off anger's arrows
from his very life?
If such doings still receive honor,
why should I dance for the gods?

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In this, their third, verse the chorus has made the existence of divine retribution a matter of contemporary as well as dramatic concern. If, they say, transgression in high places goes unpunished by the gods and they enforce no standard of right and wrong, what is the point of dancing—that is, being the chorus—in this present performance? Not only is it unreasonable here in the festival of Dionysus or anywhere else to honor gods who are no use to mankind, but if it does not matter what men do, the content of tragedy becomes meaningless and so does its performance. Without the gods the chorus' world, the Athenians' world, becomes a moral chaos.

Having reached this point in the ode, we see at last why Sophocles sets such store by the existence of gods, even if it means Athens' defeat. And yet it may still be that there are no gods, and that there is no truth in Delphi's prophecies or any others. The chorus in its last strophe contemplates this possibility, not without horror (897-910):

> No longer in reverence shall I go
> to Earth's inviolate navel-stone,
> nor to Abai's temple,
> nor to Olympia,
> if these things do not prove to fit
> so all men may point at them.
> My lord and king, if rightly so I call you,
> Zeus, ruler of all, let it not escape
> you and your everlasting dominion.
> The oracles concerning Laius, given of old, are growing faint;
> men bring them to nought now;
> Apollo is nowhere clear in his honor;
> the gods are fading away.

The chorus is referring in particular to Jocasta's attempt to discredit the oracles. Wanting to cheer her despairing husband she has repeated her assertion that the death of Laius does not square with the prophecies: he was to be killed by his own child, and now if, as seems only too likely, Oedipus has done the deed, at least (she thinks) Laius' child did not do it. She concludes therefore, and wishes Oedipus to conclude, that there is no truth in prophecy (857-8):

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So, as for divination, I'd neither look
this way today, nor the other way tomorrow.

The advantage which she sees in this for Oedipus is that it leaves him with some place to go if he is banished from Thebes as guilty of Laius' murder. He has actually voiced this problem as part of his despair (823-7), but if there is nothing in prophecy he need not fear killing his father and marrying his mother, and so can return to Corinth where his supposed parents are. But the chorus will have none of Jocasta's rationalism. Earlier, faced with Teiresias' accusation of Oedipus, they had dared hope that being after all human, the prophet might be mistaken (498-506). Now however that Jocasta has denied the possibility of any prophecy at all, they must oppose her. As we have seen in their final strophe, they feel that if oracles are not true, then there is very little left of the gods.

How right they are, Sophocles shows us in the next scene. The messenger comes from Corinth, and apparently the oracles have failed again. Oedipus' supposed father, Polybus, is dead, not by his hand, and the Corinthians are even offering him the kingship. Under these conditions leaving Thebes would be no such calamity after all—no such calamity if it were not for one thing: as we have said, despite the apparent failure of prophecy right and left, Oedipus still fears the marriage with his mother. Jocasta however trusts human logic more than he does. She puts before us at last the ultimate consequences of accepting human inability to know the future (977-83):

What is there to be afraid of when you know
that chance rules all, and nothing can be definitely predicted?
Best to live at random, as best one may.
No need to fear the wedding with your mother:
many a man before now even in dreams
has bedded with his mother. For him to whom
such matters make no difference, life is cheerfulest.

Jocasta does not mean to say precisely that incest does not matter; but that is what she says—and it does not matter, and neither does any other act, if there is no way of knowing what its results will be. Here in this passage then, in Jocasta's denial of them, have come together the two great concerns of the previous choral ode,

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universal moral law, and predictability. Like the chorus, we might find it hard to turn our backs on either one, even for Oeidpus' sake, for in these two if anywhere, even for us, "the gods" reside.

Oedipus, though he says that Jocasta is right, or would be if his mother were dead, does not quite accept her conclusion, and we are glad he does not. Neither does Jocasta as it turns out. When she discovers, as she does in the next few minutes, that she has actually committed incest, she kills herself. Would she have killed herself if she had not also discovered at the same moment that the oracles were true, and that consequently what one does matters? Obviously she would have killed herself anyway. Her response is the response of outraged instinct, much deeper than any such rational consideration; yet it is more bearable that she kills herself in obedience to a law which has been demonstrated to belong to a predictable system than that she should die as the victim of mere randomness. What the gods and prophecy stand for in the play ultimately is the assertion that this is an ordered world and not a mad one. It is better that Oedipus, and if need be Athens, should fall through the working of an ordered system, than that there should prove to be no system in terms of which to find the meaning of our lives.

II

What is the meaning, then, of Oedipus' life? What is the answer to his question:

> . . . Am I not evil?
> Am I not utterly impure?

In Greek terms the answer is that indeed he is evil, κακός. He has killed his father and married his mother, with no matter what intentions, and he pollutes god's holy sunlight. He is the worst man in the world and feels himself to be so. Yet Sophocles aims to show that he is also good, καλός, and that this is the most important thing about him

Therefore Oedipus must not only be in no way responsible for his downfall, as we have seen, but he must in no sense deserve it. Though in action he is a perfect example of the chorus's tyrant who achieves by violence a success he ought not to achieve, who touches what he ought not to touch and so topples into the abyss,

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Sophocles insists that in character he is the very opposite. He begins his exoneration of Oedipus with his opening speech (6-8):

> Not content to hear this from others, my children,
> through messengers, I am here myself,
> the man whom all men know, called Oedipus.

The stock despot hides himself from his people and deals with them only through agents (Herodotus 1.99). Again, tyrants transact their political business in private; yet when Creon asks Oedipus whether he shall deliver the oracle's response within the palace, Oedipus replies (93-4):

> Speak before all. Their trouble weighs more with me
> than my own life.

And it is true. Oedipus is not his people's master, but their servant unto death. When Teiresias tells him that his great achievement of answering the Sphinx's riddle was really his ruin, he answers (443), "If I so doing saved this city, I do not care." Most remarkable of all, when he is sure that to leave Creon alive will mean his own banishment or death, he spares him on his subjects' plea (658-72). There could be no more democratic behavior than that, and it must be clear by now that Sophocles is going out of his way to clear Oedipus of being a tyrant in intent. It is only and purely in fact that he is one, and that is the cause of his downfall.

No doubt here too there is a reference to the current Athenian situation. In Greece generally Athens was held to be "the tyrant city," the enslaver of Hellas because of her naval empire (Thucydides 1.122), and this was a principal cause of the war. Oedipus in Sophocles' play shows how it is possible to be a tyrant without meaning to, and the implication of Athens' essential innocence would not be lost on those who drew the parallel between Oedipus and Athens. Though Oedipus goes the tyrant's road from crime to catastrophe as marked out by the gods, this has nothing to do with his essential character. From the gods' and from history's point of view he is bad, κακός, but in his nature and in our sympathies he is good and noble; that is, καλός.

In fact, Oedipus' relation to his people is not that of a despot but of a father. Nothing could be clearer. His first words, the first words in the play, are "O children," and it is actually a

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deputation of children to whom he speaks. Before our eyes and his stands the hope and future of Thebes in the form of its youth, asking deliverance from a plague which attacks the city particularly in its reproductive function. The priest describes the city as (25-7):

> wasting in the fruitful produce of the land,
> wasting in its flocks and herds, and in
> the still-born births of women.

Oedipus' passion to do whatever he can to save his "children" is absolutely manifest, and a nobler, more sympathetic cause than his can scarcely be imagined, calling forth all the audience's finest feelings; what else can he seem but καλός? and yet already by the eighth line of the play we know that this is the one man in all the world who must not be a father to anybody, to his city or to his own children, for this is "the man whom all men know, called Oedipus."

This image, of the best man in the worst situation, is nearly unbearable, and it is not surprising that its beholders both ancient and modern often try to mitigate it by suggesting that Oedipus is not quite so good after all; that he does to some degree at least deserve what happens to him. The most frequent method of doing this is to accuse him of hybris. Does not Sophocles' own chorus bring this idea up in a significant way at a most crucial point in the play? It does; it is the word we translated "transgression" when we were discussing the great ode in which the chorus insists that there must be gods and that they must rule: "Transgression breeds the tyrant. . . ." The Greek word ὕβρις is often translated "pride" and that is all right if we remember that it means a very special kind of pride, the kind that leads to crossing the boundaries, breaking the rules. Whenever hybris refers to a state of mind rather than to violating, transgressing action, it means essentially the willingness to commit such action. It may be a feeling that one is so exceptional or powerful that one can behave with impunity, or it may be simply that one ignores the consequences of one's actions out of anger, lust, greed, or whatever it happens to be. Oedipus is often accused of the first type of hybris, of overvaluing himself because he insufficiently appreciates the power of the gods. His piety has been characterized

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as shallow, covering what is really the attitude of a brilliant fifth-century scientific humanist. Yet we have already seen that his reverence for the gods is a good deal greater than this suggests. We cited his ineradicable fear of the oracle that said he would marry his mother, and we may add here that the instant he suspects that Teiresias' accusation may be true, he cries (738), "Zeus, what have you planned to do with me?" This is not shallow piety, but a cry from the heart, and Oedipus certainly does not seem hybristic when he utters it.

Of course, in a sense it is overconfident and hybristic of Oedipus to try to avoid his fate, but when Delphi has told him that Apollo says that he will kill his father and marry his mother, is it less god-fearing of him to try to avoid it, or more? In the play, I submit, our natural reaction is that it was right of him to try to avoid it. I think we may even permit him to hope that he has succeeded, as he does when he hears the news of Polybus' death. Even in that hope, as we saw, his conclusion is not that he has circumvented the gods or broken their rules with impunity, but that Delphi is incapable of knowing the mind of the gods. No, the charge of hybris must rest on different grounds than these.

There are those who feel that in the opening scenes Oedipus underrates the gods and takes too much upon himself in the matter of finding the killers of Laius. They point to phrases like "I shall do all" (12, 145) and "I will start afresh, and once more make dark things plain" (132, Jebb's translation). Actually, the tone of translation in both these cases is rather too confident. In "I shall do all," Oedipus' willingness is the point (77); in the other passage the emphatic "I" in Greek serves merely to contrast Oedipus, the new investigator, with the earlier investigators who because of the Sphinx dropped the case. His future tense "I shall make plain" might as well be translated, "I shall try to make plain," for he is perfectly aware that he may fail, as his last lines in the scene indicate (145-6):

> . . . God with us,
> we'll prove successful, or else failed.

In short, he knows he is not a god, but a mortal who cannot guarantee results. If he associates himself in the god's project it is because he has been invited, and he certainly does not exclude

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others. Learning that the search for the murderer had not been pressed, Oedipus says to Creon (132-6):

> Then from the beginning, all afresh, *I* shall try to find the truth.
> Rightfully Apollo, and rightfully you,
> had this regard for the murdered man;
> so rightly you shall see me also as ally,
> in doing justice for the land and god alike.

Apollo has sent the command that the land be cleansed of the murder; Creon has acted as the god's messenger; now, Oedipus feels that it is up to him as king to perform the god's will and seek the killer out. In ancient law the investigation and prosecution of murder was essentially the duty of the family, not the state; but Laius, everyone thought, had left no sons, so that it seemed most appropriate that Oedipus should undertake the task as related to him by interest and position if not by blood (137-41, 258-68). Actually, of course, it was only too appropriate. In any case, it could not be left entirely to the god. Though it was no doubt true as the chorus said that Apollo was best able to point out the culprit, Oedipus was correct in replying (280-1):

> You are right; but to force the gods to speak
> against their will is something none can do.

Nor is Oedipus' cursing the murderer any usurpation of divine prerogative. It is right and proper that as king he should call the gods' justice down upon the criminal whom he himself is unable to identify and whom he hopes by this means to make confess (246, 295). As a result of all this, we must agree with the priest's words at the opening of the play, rather than letting them arouse suspicions about Oedipus' "pride" (31-4):

> We supplicate you at your hearth, I and these children,
> not as one equal to the gods, but judging you
> first of men both in the chances of our daily lives
> and in our dealings with the powers above.

If we take these words as the priest seems to mean them and as much else suggests that we should, it is hard to maintain that Oedipus takes too much upon himself.

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It should be noted that Oedipus is expected to have dealings with the powers above. He is the one to call upon the gods in the city's behalf, to curse or bless. He is also the one to whom the gods are thought to speak when they have business with Thebes. It is to him that Delphi's response is brought, and it was to him, the city thinks, that the gods gave the answer to the Sphinx's riddle (35-9). He appears then, at least at first, not as the gods' rival but as their agent. Consequently when the quarrel with Teiresias develops, it is not a question of Oedipus' intending to pit his human wisdom against the divinely inspired knowledge of Teiresias. He doubts neither Apollo, nor inspiration, nor even seercraft; he simply seems to have proof that Teiresias is a fraud (I paraphrase 390-8): "Where were you," he asks, "when the Sphinx asked her riddle? There, if ever, was a question that needed seercraft, and yet you had nothing to say. No, it was I, this Oedipus you find so ignorant, who guessed it. I hit it with my mind; I needed no birds to tell me." The ambiguity here is a perfect reflection of human inability to know whether the gods are helping or not. It has never occurred to Oedipus to ask whether he solved the riddle unaided. Everything he says in the rest of the play suggests that like most Greeks he assumed the gods' help in any success and would recoil in horror from the hybris of "I did it all myself," notorious from the time of Homer at least. We have seen that it was assumed by the rest of Thebes at any rate that the gods helped him. So Oedipus' natural meaning here is, "The gods speak to me, not you—you and your birds." And yet in the thought that in Teiresias' case the birds are mere hocus-pocus is the germ of the thought, "all bird-divination is hocus-pocus," and from here to rejection of all divine inspiration is not so far. We can only conclude, however, that it is too simple to say of this scene that Oedipus compares Teiresias' divine wisdom unfavorably to his own unaided human insight. Such a comparison is potentially there, but it is not intended by the speaker. The hybris will be in the mind of the audience, and it is there that the debate over the power of the gods and the truth of prophecy is being fought out. The furthest that Oedipus himself goes on the way to unbelief is to doubt the existence of a technique of prophecy, whether possessed by augurs such as Teiresias or by Delphi. Hearing of Polybus' death, he is finally brought to say (964-6):

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> Alack! Why then should any heed be paid, my wife,
> to Pytho's prophetic shrine, or to the birds
> that scream above us?

In the scene with Teiresias, however, he has not yet gone so far, and even after he has entertained this doubt, he still fears the prophecy about his mother. We cannot, then, find Oedipus, in his quarrel with Teiresias or anywhere else, guilty of mental hybris to any degree worth speaking of. If he hopes that somehow he may manage to escape the awful crimes predicted for him, it is not because he does not fear the gods. He can only hope that Delphi is mistaken.

As far then as the kind of hybris is concerned which consists in ignoring or underrating or seeking to rival the gods, Oedipus is not responsible for and does not deserve his own downfall. A better case can be made for an Oedipus who is led into hybris by wrath. For one thing, in *Oedipus at Colonus,* his last play, Sophocles has both Creon and Antigone in their different ways accuse Oedipus of excessive anger, Creon even calling it his constant disfigurement—he might almost have said tragic flaw (852-5, 1195-1200). Yet they are both wrong: Oedipus in that play finds his final rest in the grove of the Furies, and he is taken to the gods after blasting his own son with a blazing curse. Surely Sophocles is vindicating Oedipus' wrath here, and without prejudging the issue we may look for the same vindication in *Oedipus the King.*

Oedipus' anger is certainly emphasized in *Oedipus the King.* We have only to think of the following passage from the scene with Teiresias (334-48):

> O. So, you wretch—for you would anger
> stone itself—you will not tell?
> You'll be so deaf to pity and will not budge?
> T. You blame me for the anger I cause you,
> while that which you cause, living with you,
> you do not see—and so scold me.
> O. Who would not be angry hearing such words
> as these with which you just now wronged your city?
>
> . . . .

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T. I'll say no more. With that in mind, rage
if you like with the wildest anger you can find.
O. I will; and angry, I'll not leave out one jot
of what I understand. Know that to my mind
you helped to frame the deed, and did it, too,
all but the slaying itself.

This anger only increases if anything in the scene with Creon which follows and in the reported scene of Oedipus' self-binding; but the first thing to notice is that it does not cause the real catastrophe. That, namely killing his father and marrying his mother, has already happened. The anger causes instead the revelation of the truth, and this we must finally count as good, especially considering the way Sophocles writes his play. In the beginning we expect the truth to save Thebes, and if it does not in the end, it does something better; it aims to save us all. The anger brings out the truth quite specifically: without it Teiresias would not have spoken, as he admits (358); Oedipus would have had no occasion to blame Creon; and Jocasta would not have mentioned the place where three roads meet. To this extent, then, Oedipus' anger is vindicated.

Secondly, it is vindicated in that its source is Oedipus' passionate, fatherly public spirit. Seeking to induce Teiresias to reveal the murderers of Laius, he pronounces what is evidently the goal of his own life and one of the noblest sentiments ever uttered (314-5):

. . . to help with all
he has and can is a good man's fairest toil.

Even in the face of this plea and the terrible distress of the city, Teiresias will not speak, and this is what makes Oedipus' anger burst forth. Almost immediately it spreads to Creon for equally public-spirited reasons, for good evidence is forthcoming that he and Teiresias are, if not the murderers of Laius, at least plotters for the crown, meanly trying to profit from the plague. Even so, and this is a third powerful vindication, Oedipus does not act on his wrath in either case. He spares Teiresias as too old to punish (402-3), and most remarkable of all as we have seen, he spares Creon on the plea of Jocasta and the chorus even though he

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thinks it means his ruin. I think we must confess that this is no way for Sopholes to portray anger as a tragic flaw.

Finally, Oedipus' undoubted anger does not blind him, but rather increases if anything his clarity of mind. It is true that he misjudges Teiresias and Creon, but fate has planted clues such that a mind as keen as his cannot help but suspect foul play (this is a point well made by Bernard Knox in his book *Oedipus at Thebes*). There is Teiresias' silence at the time of the murder coupled with his "reluctant" accusation now (562-73); plus the fact that Creon suggested that Teiresias be sent for (555-6); plus Creon's lateness on the road to Delphi (73-5); plus Teiresias' postponement of his own appearance (287-9). Above all there is Oedipus' consciousness of his own innocence, mistaken though it is. On that assumption what can Teiresias' accusation be other than a plot against himself, and who stands to gain from it but Creon? So there is no blindness in Oedipus' anger. Coming from his patriotism and public spirit, it is rather a source of strength.

What then of the death of Laius, even though it is "outside the drama" in Aristotle's phrase: did not anger cause that? It did indeed, but here too there is no fault to find with Oedipus. As he tells Jocasta the story of his meeting with his father, he says of the servant who was trying to thrust him from the path (807), "I struck him in anger." The incident might have ended there but that Laius, biding his time, struck his son on the head with a three-pronged goad as he passed the carriage. "Then," says Oedipus, "I killed them all" (813). Though Oedipus is mightly angry here, he has clearly suffered the kind of treatment no Greek was meant to put up with except from a parent. No Greek would wish that Oedipus should fail to resist either the first time or the second if the man in the carriage were not his father. So Sophocles by his manner of telling the story evidently means to exonerate Oedipus here also, showing him as possessing anger indeed, but an anger without which from a Greek point of view he would be only a slavish sort of man.

Fate, not anger, arranged the meeting with Laius just as it arranged the course of the argument with Teiresias. Teiresias is conscious that matters are being conducted by a higher power, both in his coming, which he has not really intended (318), and in his speaking out in response to Oedipus' wrath, as he had

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certainly not meant to do (358). From this he knows that Apollo, without his help, is bringing Oedipus to his fall (356-8, 376-7). In *Oedipus the King,* then, destiny, not character, is destiny, as we have been insisting from the first.

III

Sophocles found in the myth of a blameless Oedipus brought low by fate the answer to the religious crisis of his day. At the same time, he made more of Oedipus' anger than would seem strictly necessary given the terms of the problem. There seem to be two reasons for this, one historical and the other philosophical, or perhaps better, just human. For the first reason, it seems likely that in Aeschylus and perhaps the tradition as a whole, Oedipus' anger did cause his downfall; for the second, it seems that in this anger Sophocles found the only hope for mankind.

To judge from *Seven Against Thebes,* the only surviving play of Aeschylus' Oedipus-trilogy, Oedipus blinded himself and cursed his sons in a passion of self-hatred as soon as he learned the truth that he had killed his father and married his mother (778-91). For Aeschylus the blinding and the cursing were mad and deluded actions, however understandable and inevitable (725, 781). They were inevitable as manifestations of the Fury brought into the house of Labdacus when Laius produced a son in defiance of Apollo's word, for this Fury both made Eteocles slay his own brother at the seventh gate and made Oedipus do what he did (719, 742-91, 1054-6); yet the Fury operated in effect as part of the character of Oedipus and Eteocles (677-8). When this happens, a Fury makes a tragedy fall somewhere between a tragedy of character and a tragedy of fate, as is evident also in the *Oresteia*-trilogy. Figures like Agamemnon and Eteocles cannot help themselves on the one hand, but on the other they seem to deserve what happens to them and we do not feel to the same extent as we do with Sophocles' Oedipus that this could happen to anybody. This then was evidently the new point that Sophocles wanted to make. Aeschylus' Oedipus-trilogy by all indications left one with a vivid impression of the power of the gods to lead men to destruction—if at least they were beset by Furies; his *Oresteia* added to the sense of the gods' power the feeling that it was

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ultimately, through however much pain, a power for good; now in *Oedipus the King* Sophocles wishes to suggest that although that power, as a predictable order rather than chaos, is absolutely essential, it can at the same time spell the ruin of an Athens or an Oedipus, however virtuous. Does not this finally annihilate all possible significance in human choice and action?

Sophocles' answer is, "No." Just as he reshapes the Aeschylean fate, so he reshapes the Aeschylean Fury as manifested in Oedipus' anger. In it he finds not an ancestral curse, but a spring or motive for human meaning in the somber world which he has defined. We can best see how this is done by considering in detail the end of his play.

Oedipus is now completely alone. Creon has become his enemy, and his relation to the chorus has collapsed from both sides. Their seemingly foolish support of Creon has alienated him, and they themselves have as good as told us that if it comes to that, they must choose the gods, not him. Creon is gone, the chorus is gone, and now in the next-to-last episode Jocasta deserts him after the messenger has revealed that he is not Polybus' child after all. Not knowing yet what she knows, he thinks she has left the stage scorning him because he has lost his connection with the royal family of Corinth and perhaps with any legitimate free-born blood. But such is his sense of his own worth, and I think we must agree with him, that he triumphs even in this extremity. He *know*s he is good. His fortune has been good. He has solved the Sphinx's riddle, become king of Thebes, and now he has been offered the kingship of Corinth. No matter what his birth, he is the sum of the achievements of the moments of his life; Good Luck is his mother, he says (1080); the months are his brothers, which "defined alike [his] insignificance and [his] greatness" (1082-3). Thus he is related to time and fate, if not to well-born people. Since he is good, whatever his birth was, it must be good, and he will search it out (1084-5).

The chorus responds to this in their next-to-last ode (1086-1109) with almost delirious enthusiasm. They have not wanted in the least to see their king go down, and now it appears he is up. It is true that he may have killed Laius and may be forced to leave Thebes on that account, but if he leaves, it will be to become king of Corinth. Better yet, the fact of his miraculous preservation

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when he was exposed at birth makes him, like Cyrus and like Moses, seem something more than mortal. As the chorus speculates about which god mated with which nymph on Cithaeron to produce him, we get a profound sense of the dignity and worth of Oedipus; he, a man, really does seem godlike at this juncture, in spite of what we know. And Oedipus' own idea, that he or any man is really the child of Luck, that is of Time, of his times, of what he has done and what has happened to him,—notice that the months are his brothers—his idea that a man is this and is to be valued accordingly puts man and himself into relation with the eternal and absolute and makes him a sort of god. Shall we count this hybris? We know the fall will come, that Oedipus is the child of Bad Luck, not Good, and yet we cannot help feeling that Oedipus is right.

In the 76 brutal lines of the next episode (1110-85) the secret is out. The oracles are confirmed. There are rules and they do hold and Oedipus has broken them. No big words for the rules, no big words for the violation. Oedipus simply says (1182-5),

> Oh, oh, it would all come out.
> Light, may I never look on you again. You looked on me
> and I was shown born of those of whom I should not
> have been born,
> living with those with whom I should not have lived,
> and killing those whom I should not have killed.

There is a triple pun on *light, shown,* and *born.* Surely Oedipus has been revealed as κακός?

He goes in, and it is of some importance that the chorus does not conclude at this point that Pride goeth before a fall, or that hot tempers do themselves the greatest injury. Instead, they conclude that man is nothing. If it can happen to Oedipus, it can happen to anybody, and if this is so, what is the point of living? All the generations of men are the same as if they had never lived at all, they say (1186-8), and (1217-8):

> We wish, we wish, Oedipus,
> that we had never seen you.

In short they wish he had never existed.

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Indeed there seems little else for Oedipus to do now but kill himself. That is what Jocasta did, as we are soon to discover. The play goes on for another 300 lines at least, and yet what more is there to say?

It will appear that there is much more to say, and that it concerns this very matter of whether Oedipus is nothing and better off dead, or after all something, and if so what? This is an important question, the chorus has implied, for it applies to all of us (1220-2):

> . . . To speak correctly,
> I took my life from you, Oedipus,
> and with you I closed my eye again in death.

From the words of the messenger, and afterwards from the words and actions of Oedipus himself, we can trace what he does after he suffers the worst that fate can do. "What he does," rather than "what becomes of him," for the messenger emphasizes that the evils he is about to tell of are self-chosen, not involuntary like those which have come before; he points out also that self-inflicted woes are the hardest to bear (1229-31). Evidently Oedipus is not destroyed; instead that tremendous spirit of his, that rage to live if we wish to call it so, continues undiminished. And notice that the credit is all Oedipus'. Apollo does not care whether the pollution is killed or banished (100-1). *His* purpose is fulfilled either way. Oedipus, however, chooses to live.

If you beat a dog with a stick, it is said, the dog will bite the stick, not you. Oedipus, beaten down to the level of pure instinct, burst into the house screaming, strode up and down, calling for a spear and asking where that wife-no-wife was and that womb, the double seed-bed of his children and himself (1252-7). I can see only one explanation of this, and that is that his first impulse was to strike at the thing which seemed to be injuring him. I think that this is true to nature, and encouraging, for if Sophcles is right, this aggression will lead Oedipus and the rest of us to something rather than to nothing. The same angry force in him which wrung the truth from the prophet Teiresias, now leads him back to life. "Some god," the messenger says, "not we, surely, who were there," showed Oedipus where his wife was hidden, and he crashed through the barred door (1258-62). No stumbling, as at

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least one translation has it. It is impossible not to associate this image with Oedipus' god-assisting drive for truth throughout the play, and he has now reached truth's innermost recess. Jocasta has forestalled his violent act by her own, and again it was no gentle thing. One realizes the hatred with which she called upon Laius and those old engenderings through which he died and she was left to breed children by her own child (1245-50). She attacked the one thing left which she could, and that was her own life. When he found her hanging, Oedipus roared like a bull and took her down, then with her brooches struck his eyes again and again. For his eyes too had offended him (1263-79). Now comes one of the keys to this last part of the play, in the mere shape of the language. In the act of striking his eyes Oedipus shouts not simply that they should not see, but that they *should see in darkness* those they ought never to have looked upon (1271-4). Seeing in darkness is still a kind of seeing. He makes a positive of the negative, and that is what he has been doing and will continue to do from now on.

There is plenty of the negative, of nothingness, for him to work with. As after the catastrophe he appears, sightless, before us, his first words are (1307-11):

> Oh, oh, unfortunate that I am,
> whither in the world an I being borne; where
> does my voice carry on the empty air?
> Ah, my fate, what a far leap you have made!

He feels that he has been carried out of contact with everything and that he possesses literally that life of nothingness, beyond fate, without a part in anything, with which he cursed the murderer, himself (246-8). The chorus replies (1312) that that leap was, "Into the terrible, beyond hearing, beyond seeing," and Oedipus answers:

> Ah my cloud of darkness, unapproachable, unspeakably
> circling,
> not to be conquered, never to be fathomed.

And yet he climbs back from here.

The first step is marked by the pain, physical and mental, which he feels (1316-18):

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Ah, pain
and pain again! The double sting
of the brooches' points and the thought of what I did!

That is at least something, and something strong. He has found himself. Next he finds his fellows. He hears the chorus' voices, and recognizes them. Blind as he is, he says (1325) that he *knows clearly* that it is they. For a man who has been as deceived as Oedipus has, that is invincible courage of his convictions. Thirdly, he recognizes the gods, and at the same time both his subjection to them and his independence from them. "What god impelled you to endure to blind yourself?" the chorus asks (1328), and he replies:

It was Apollo, my friends, Apollo
who brought about my so evil fate;
but no one struck my eyes
but I my wretched self.

With self, fellow men, and gods, he has found the world again, even though it is a world of horror.

One is tempted to agree when the chorus says that Oedipus would be better off dead than blind (1368); Oedipus, however, is sure that he was right not to kill himself. His reasons are queer, but suggestive (1369-74). He could not bear to look on his father and mother in the underworld, so he blinds himself in order that he may not have a seeing ghost. He ought in that case to blind himself and then kill himself, but that is not in accordance with his spirit. As his crimes were "stronger than hanging" (1374) so he himself seems simply too strong for dying. When he thinks of all he cannot bear to see and hear, he would put out his ears if he could, he says, as well as his eyes, so that his mind might "dwell beyond the reach of evil" (1375-90). Simpler to get beyond evil by dying, one would think—but notice that Oedipus assumes that his mind, though cut off, shall continue to live, to "dwell." As it turns out, he has the strength to live with utter horror.

It is indeed sufficiently surprising that he has come on stage at all. Contrary to what we would expect, the messenger has told us (1287-9) that after blinding himself he shouted for someone to "unbar the door and show to Thebes the father's murderer,

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the mother's . . . "—the messenger cannot bring himself to say it, but Oedipus can,—to say it and to show it. It is as though he instinctively felt that what has happened to him, far from demonstrating his nothingness, is something terribly important that he must show to all the world.

As he finishes trying to explain why he did not kill himself, negative thoughts keep turning into positive images (1391-1408). I should have died a baby on Cithaeron, he implies. Then I would not have . . .—and he lists once more and even more horribly the things he has done. Then, "since one should not say what one should not do," he continues, "hide me out of the country, kill me, drown me, so you will not have to look at me longer." Thus his will is once more in line with the god's commands that the unclean thing shall be removed from the suffering city. He has been thinking of this almost from the moment he blinded himself, as the messenger has told us (1290-1):

> He would throw himself forth from the land, and no more stay in the house accursed, as he cursed himself.

A large part of the motive here is negative—revulsion and self-hatred; and yet its effect is the same as Oedipus' old motive: to help with all he has and can.

Ironically, to drive him out the chorus will have to touch him (1413) since he cannot travel without someone to lead him (1292-3), and this they refuse to do (1416). Once more Oedipus is rejected, but fear of the rejection brings with it a new positive realization and a kind of greatness. No one need fear his contact, he discovers (1414-5): he alone is capable of his suffering; since no one else *can* bear it, it will not spread.

At this moment, to the chorus' relief, Creon comes in, and his ideas prove to be repugnant indeed. Since Oedipus pollutes the light and air, he says, he must be taken into the house (1429). We all know that this is wrong: Apollo has commanded the Thebans to purge Thebes, not implant the infection, and has not Teiresias said that Oedipus would go forth from the land, tapping with a stick (455)? From now on the play is a conflict between Creon's desire to take Oedipus inside and wait until further word comes from the god, and Oedipus' desire to make sure of being banished and thus of fulfilling the god's command. This has been the con-

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trast between them all along. We remember Creon's suggestion at the very beginning of the play (91-2) that he deliver the word from Delphi inside, in private, as compared with Oedipus' desire that it should be told outside, in front of all. Creon is a hider, Oedipus a revealer. Creon would rather neither rule nor act if at all possible (583-602); Oedipus wishes to help with all he has and can as long as it is open to him. In this conflict we must obviously be on Oedipus' side.

To Creon, Oedipus repeats his request to banish him from the company of men, with the added notion that his parents had meant that he should be cast out to die on Cithaeron (1436, 1451-4). Oedipus is doing his best to carry out the pattern of his life, so far as he can understand it, but he suddenly realizes that he need not struggle. He reflects that his parents' design was thwarted, and so he says (1455-8):

> And yet this much I know: no disease
> nor anything else, may destroy me; for I would not
> have been saved from death except for some terrible
> evil (κακῷ);
> *so let my fate go where it will.*

What he is headed for may be evil, but he can trust the god to bring it about.

He ceases to importune Creon for death or banishment, and asks instead for his daughters. It turns out that these children he thought he could never bear to see again are still a source of delight (1474, 1477). Though he knows now what he is, and what they are, and how begotten, he loves them still. Their lives, he sees, hold no hope of happiness, and yet he can wish that they should live, and that Creon take care of them (1462-6, 1486-510). In agreeing to this, Creon touches him at last (1510), and Oedipus is completely restored to contact with the world. Together with his fate, he has regained his friend, his children and his city, even if his function now, as he thinks, is to be apart from them. Such are the paradoxes and ambiguities through which Sophocles is showing that even Oedipus' horrible fate is a kind of good.

Oedipus' last words to his daughters are a cryptic and poignant piece of advice (1512-4):

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. . . pray
that you may always live where it is time (καιρός)
to live, and have
a better life than did the father who begot you.

It would seem that Oedipus himself had not lived in the right place at the right time: he should never have left Corinth at the moment that Laius was returning from Delphi, and he could not have picked a worse time to live in Thebes. Yet what he means becomes clearer as the scene comes to its climax. Creon again bids him to go within; Oedipus, having accepted his fate, says that he will, though it is hard. Now Creon makes the final point: he says (1516):

All things in their time (καιρός) are good.

The polluted Oedipus is about to enter the house from which the god and his own curse have commanded him to be driven, and yet Creon can say, in effect, that this too, in its time, is good (καλός). Creon does not know how much he is saying, but we soon discover that he is righter than he knows. Going in turns out to be the equivalent of going out, the man hated of god is the equivalent of the man loved of god, bad Oedipus, the child of Bad Luck, is good Oedipus, the child of the Right Time, who does what time has marked out for him. All things in their time are good.

Oedipus goes in, but only on condition that he be driven out (1517-8). Going in is going out. "Only the god can grant this condition," says Creon. "But the gods hate me," says Oedipus. "Then you will get your wish," says Creon, meaning that if the gods hate Oedipus, they will insure his expulsion. It can be as valuable, then, to be hated by the gods as loved by them. The same purpose is achieved. One has a fate; one is in relation to the order of the world, one does what one must at the time one must. "Take me away then," says Oedipus (1521), and even that "away" instead of "in" makes Sophocles' point; the two are the same. "Go, and leave your daughters," says Creon. "Do not take them from me!" cries Oedipus. Creon insists, though in words which imply that Oedipus has all but won the conflict (1522-3):

Do not seek to prevail in everything;
the power you had did not last throughout your life.

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Even this, however, is ambiguous. Oedipus is going in, but the audience realizes that eventually he will go out, tapping with a stick as Teiresias predicted. His daughters are taken from him now, but the audience, which knows the story, realizes that then, one of them at least will be with him, leading him into exile. His power seems gone now, but his life is by no means finished whatever Creon may think; in the sequel he will exhibit a nearly divine power: his curse will kill his sons, and after his death his wrath as hero will protect Athens. He is in fact being "saved for some terrible evil" (1457), all the sad rest of the story of the house of Thebes. The last words of the chorus, which I think must be genuine though some have suspected them, underline this irony. Call no man happy until you have looked on his final day, they say, and Oedipus' fall from happiness is certainly a case in point. But the contrary also holds. Oedipus, who had chosen both for himself and his daughters not to die, but to live where it is time to live, is not dead. No one has yet seen his final day, and consequently we cannot say yet that he is unhappy. He has committed crimes such as no man before him and bears the full burden of that guilt, but that too, since he has accepted it, gives him a place in the world, and a unique one. Having suffered the worst that fate can do, and chosen to survive, he knows, and through him we know, that nothing can destroy us. I take it that Creon's remark, "Everything at the right time is good," applies here also. It is good to perform one's role in the scheme of things, no matter how terrible that role is, just because it is a scheme. To be a part of fate, the child of the Right Time, is in itself good, and godlike, and partakes of the eternal.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Translations from Octavio Paz

TOMB OF THE POET

The book
The glass
The green obscurely a stalk
The record
Sleeping beauty in her bed of music
Things drowned in their names
To say them with the eyes
In a beyond I cannot tell where
Nail them down
Lamp pencil portrait
This that I see
To nail it down
Like a living temple
Plant it
Like a tree
A god
Crown it
With a name
Immortal
Derisible crown of thorns—
Speech!
The stalk and its imminent flower
Sun-sex-sun
The flower without shadow
In a beyond without where
Opens
Like the horizon
Opens
Immaculate extension
Transparency which sustains things
Fallen
Raised up
By the glance

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Held
In a reflection
Moons multiplied
Across the steppe
Bundle of worlds
Instants
Glowing bunches
Moving forests of stars
Wandering syllables
Millennia of sand endlessly falling away
Tide
All the times of time
TO BE
A second's fraction
Lamp pencil portrait
In a here I cannot tell where
A name
Begins
Seize on it, plant it, say it
Like a wood that thinks
Flesh it
A lineage begins
In a name
An adam
Like a living temple
Name without shadow
Nailed
Like a god
In this here-without-where—
Speech!
I cease in its beginning
In this that I say
I cease
TO BE
Shadow of an instantaneous name
I shall never know my bond's undoing

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USTICA

The successive suns of summer,
The succession of the sun and of its summers,
All the suns,
The sole, the sol of sols
Now become
Obstinate and tawny bone,
Darkness-before-the-storm
Of matter cooled.

Fist of stone,
Pinecone of lava,
Ossuary,
Not earth
Nor island either,
Rock off a rockface,
Hard peach,
Sun-drop petrified.

Through the nights one hears
The breathing of the cisterns,
The panting of fresh water
Troubled by the sea.
The hour is late and the light, greening.
The obscure body of the wine
Asleep in jars
Is a darker and cooler sun.

Here the rose of the depths
Is a candelabrum of pinkish veins
Kindled on the sea-bed,
Ashore, the sun extinguishes it,
Pale, chalky lace
As if desire were worked by death.

Cliffs the colour of sulphur,
High austere stones.
You are beside me,

Author's Note: Ustica is a volcanic desert island in the Sicilian sea. It was a Saracen graveyard.

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Your thoughts are black and golden.
To extend a hand
Is to gather a cluster of truths intact.
Below, between sparkling rocks
Goes and comes
A sea full of arms.
Vertigos. The light hurls itself headlong.
I looked you in the face,
I saw into the abyss:
Mortality is transparency.

Ossuary: paradise:
Our roots, knotted
In sex, in the undone mouth
Of the buried Mother.
Incestuous trees
That maintain
A garden on the dead's domain.

TOUCH

My hands
Open the curtains of your being
Clothe you in a further nudity
Uncover the bodies of your body
My hands
Invent another body for your body

FRIENDSHIP

It is the awaited hour
Over the table falls
Interminably
The lamp's spread hair
Night turns the window to immensity
There is no one here
Presence without name surrounds me.

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DAWN

Cold rapid hands
Draw back one by one
The bandages of dark
I open my eyes
Still
I am living
At the centre
Of a wound still fresh

HERE

My steps along this street
Resound
In another street
In which
I hear my steps
Passing along this street
In which

Only the mist is real

ORACLE

The cold lips of the night
Utter a word
Column of grief
No word but stone
No stone but shadow
Vaporous thought
Through my vaporous lips real water
Word of truth
Reason behind my errors
If it is death only through that do I live
If it is solitude I speak in serving it
It is memory and I remember nothing
I do not know what it says and I trust myself to

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How to know oneself living
How to forget one's knowing
Time that half-opens the eyelids
And sees us, letting itself be seen.

CERTAINTY

If it is real the white
Light from this lamp, real
The writing hand, are they
Real, the eyes looking at what I write?

From one word to the other
What I say vanishes.
I know that I am alive
Between two parentheses.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

Flying Below Sea Level

from SKIN FLIGHTS

After hours under water, a mask
for face,
air is a ceiling,
and sky a comfortable myth,
like heaven.
Sun, a film
of white-hot molten light,
floats
on the surface,

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like oil. It will scald my scalp
if I rise—
to get my breath.
Here and there, planes of light
intersect
the surface, knife
the upper field, and fan out
in shelves.
In shallows, they strike
bottom, spilling rainbow
all about
the coral. There
are brains in the fish's tail
(alert
for messages), the fins
are nerves, each scale a fingertip. . .
My cheek,
slapped by a moulded
soft-spongy mass, half-moon
shaped—
gently stinging—
I dodge a gelatin-trio, running
with the current
faster than I can
swim away. Then, I'm surrounded
by hordes,
mounds bumping
each other, sliding around me—
painless
between my legs,
across my face. Wherever I
look, the sea
is milky-translucent,
separate outlines no longer
visible.
The water, gelling
into a vast slug-slimy pudding—
impenetrable—
half-carries me along

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(a man-blob swallowed in viscid
ooze), half-
disgorging me,
by turns. I dive, down-thrust
through a hole
opening just under
me, swim below the flying island
of jelly,
and enter the under-
water cave. I hear a high-pitched
crackling,
like dry twigs
burning, on all sides enclosed
by a soundless
hush. I hang,
motionless, at the center of the cave:
magnetized. . .
I am seen
by thousands of unseen eyes!
I shudder
at a burst of color:
a large hog-fish, bright scarlet-
orange, appears;
high-finned, majestic,
wide and flat, brilliant-sheened;
seeming twice
its size, swelled
in enclosure. No change in his wide-eyed
elongated
hog-snout at sight
of me, no change in his glide-rythm,
he picks up
speed as he spins,
circling the interior of the cavern;
so nervous
to escape me, he misses
the exits, tunnels, again and again.
The space
around me expands.

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Light from no source filters up
from depths
without bottom.
I grow larger and larger. The cave
I filled
fills me. As I wind,
snake-easeful, back through the cave-
mouth, I
feel the whole sea
tilt to fill the missing space.

Flying on the Surface

Aloft on the unpunctured float
Of lungs and flipper-rubber,
I thread the needlefish with my spear, a snorkeling
Head-hunter: the gar leading
With pointed nose,
Two interlocked

Rows of teeth, saw-edged,
That can cut a brother
In two—the decapitated head snapping blindly
At whatever passes before it,
Long after the severed
Body has fallen

Away: needlefish javelins
Streaking after fry,
Targets themselves for swooping birds: one gar, struck
By a gull divebomber—instantly
Disembowelled—
Dies, a still live

Minnow in its mouth. My forehead,
Submerged, konks

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The feet of a snoozing pelican, listless, drooping
Discarded knotty branches
Near the raft
Of his broad bottom,

Shading eleven small squids
Back-jetting in an undulant
Double-V formation: a sine wave motion, ribbon-
Winding from end to end.
I jab at the middle
Link: it spurts

Three feet ahead of the chain,
But divides in two,
Splits—no, doubles!—leaving an inky-black pseudo-
morph
In its place, impaled round
My spear-point, thinning
To a smoke-ring. Near

Stumpy Point, where bay-mouth
Meets open sea,
Breakers converging from three sides at once, mixing
And chopping their flows, reinforcing
Or cancelling by turns—
I slip in shallow

Water, yellowtail on my spear.
Juggling gun-shaft
And spear in one hand, unsheathed knife in the other,
Unbalancing on one leg
In two feet of water—
I'm struck from behind

By a six-foot wave I didn't
Hear building over me
From the left, the wave silently purring a surf-lip
As the crest curls down in a fist
On foam—to pounce
With cat's stealth: I hear

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A cracked-whip's impact before I
Recall it is my side
And neck that echo back; taste blood in the salt
Before I know my life-stream
The one opened, and on
The run—escaping

Smoothly as into a love-sucking
Mouth; see a black fin
Slicing the surface and circling toward me before I
Register the terror-sound
Of flippered feet
Wedging between coral

Jaws to brace the mindless
Trunk they swing upon
Absently, my legs a lever, bending against the back-
Wash of the wave's undertow
Pulling seaward to meet
A next hammering wave.

Shark-meat! Half-aliveness will eat
You alive! On all fours,
I scramble ashore. . . . Now in dreams, I sink into brainless
Stupor, a carcass emptied
Of self, a drifting
Deadwood, a flotsam

Of absent flesh: my legs two
Shanks of floating
Sea-fodder, my arm-bones crossed sticks under a death's-
Head skull, my eyes looking
Out through a death
Mask of face

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PHILIP LEVINE

The End of Your Life

First light. This misted field
is the world, that man
slipping the greased bolt

back and forth, that man
tunneled with blood
the dark smudges of whose eyes

call for sleep, calls
for quiet, and the woman
down your line,

the woman who screamed the loudest,
will be quiet.
The rushes, the grassless shale,

the dust, whiten like droppings.
One blue
grape hyacinth whistles

in the thin and birdless air
without breath.
Ten minutes later

a lost dog poked
for rabbits, the stones
slipped, a single blade

of grass stiffened in sun;
where the wall
broke a twisted fig

thrust its arms ahead
like a man
in full light blinded.

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In the full light the field
your eyes held
became grain by grain

one slope of father mountain,
one stone of earth
set in the perfect blackness.

Coming Home, Detroit, 1968

A winter Tuesday, the city pouring fire,
Ford Rouge sulfurs the sun, Cadillac, Lincoln,
Chevy grey. The fat stacks
of breweries hold their tongues. Rags,
papers, hands, the stems of birches
dirtied with words.
Near the freeway
you stop and wonder what came off,
recall the snowstorm where you lost it all,
the wolverine, the northern bear, the wolf
caught out, ice and steel raining
from the foundries in a shower
of human breath. On sleds in the false sun
the new material rests. One brown child
stares and stares into your frozen eyes
until the lights change and you go
forward to work. The charred faces, the eyes
boarded up, the rubble of innards, the cry
of wet smoke hanging in your throat,
the twisted river stopped at the color of iron.
We burn this city every day.

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EUGENIA PLUNKETT

Coming Back from Psychotherapy

The snow sparkles, and the truth
sings like a bird inside me: all
the world is for nothing but this white desert where
no sound on the air, but one inside me,
sings what you said: "Perspective." We have lost
perspective, doctor, all of us.
Your words, beautiful and superfluous,
ring in my head as I walk down the stair,
across the park, its pallor in my eyes
a bright surprise,
even as your words were. You, tall and spare
guardian in a broad eternity
that spreads out grossly unaware
of you and me—
you finally said, "It may be true."
You meant, it may be true, the song I've sung
over and over to you,
telling the truth—fatuity of our bare
existence, barren trees and empty air,
and snow for miles, and death, and uselessness.
Yet still you seem to stare
at me, and seem to say that we
may find "Perspective" here.
Nowhere,
though we should grope forever in
this plain of snow
will we ever know
the pope's and the bird's illimitable hope.

But then, we do have words:
"Nowhere," my word, "Perspective," your word—which
are like two trees arisen from a ditch
of high, wild grass, two trees wherein two birds

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repeat two sounds which are not really there
unless *we* are. "Perspective." You can hear
it often—you can know it anywhere,
if you listen quietly,
our talk being like a high bird-bearing tree
upon a desert, with eternity
like cold air and like shining fields around
us . . . yet . . . and yet—
we know
not as bird to bird above the snow.
My word to you a half an hour ago,
your word to me,
concerned more than the height of that white tree,
or what seeds could be salvaged from the sea
of whiteness far below.
What could be salvaged for heart's ease? we said—
my heart, though hardly home, being not yet dead,
and deep within, though like a red bird's red,
being something burning whiter than the snow.

Encounter, Psychiatric Institute

That awful
Anonymity.
She smiled at me
From her pinned-down, stretched-out position flat
On the tilted stretcher two big men
Were hustling down the stairway. "Whom have I
To thank for care of me?" she seemed to say.
She smiled at me. Dark red and bright red were
The colors of her arm. Suddenly I knew
She'd done that shredding.
Dire, innocuous smile!

That anonymity? All people, strange
(Sudden, yet by an awful, slow degree

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I knew), could never get a small word in
On her dark room, her razor, finger, arm,
Or her blind soul presiding. "Hear ye!" she
Said to the dark room of the world, alone.
And later, even, outside, like galaxies
Of rocks—the stars—or animals—the dogs—
All we could ever do was stand and stare.
And there, the arm, bare. Like her own soul, bare.
She smiles at me across the ribbons—flesh—
That say, "I am alone—without a sound
You talk, without a recognition see
The star, the animal, the blood of me."

DOROTHY ROBERTS

Float

Water goes in and out of the reed's cell,
in and out of the gill
but the boat is that form that floats.

Watertight, caulked it coerces the water to be with it—
"Always when I am alive you are with me,
yet enter not and the lapping is continual."
This is the most graceful elaboration of the communion,
oars dip and the ripples of progress circle about it
and the furrow behind is a form.

Go lonely boat and be at dawn in the mist
and be at evening on the beach
just out of reach of the long ripple, a shell.

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Staying

Islands are sand and shrubbery and sedge grass
willing to go, if need be, with the river,
float like a boat, or wear away while tethered
by roots of sand and rock, bound round with lilies.

They are the limit to which land loves the water,
paddles and deep fish move and the sandpipers
sprinkled upon it liven the sand with the heron,
clams scrawl over textured sandridges.

Dipped in the beds of lilies paddles brush quiet,
herons flap up and all is like a painting
by chinese water colorists, indeed it is one
so long and quietly these islands have persisted.

So it is logical to say that islands
coerce the things in flux to stay awhile,
to stand awhile delayed in forms and fragrances
freshening out of the mist of early morning.

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BERT O. STATES

Pinter's *Homecoming*: The Shock of Nonrecognition

> TEDDY: You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest idea of what they were about. You wouldn't appreciate the points of reference. You're way behind. All of you. There's no point in my sending you my works. You'd be lost. It's nothing to do with the question of intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two, to balance the two. To see, to be able to *see!* I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works. Might do you good . . . have a look at them . . . see how certain people can view . . . things . . . how certain people can maintain . . . intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You're just objects. You just . . . move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being . . . I won't be lost in it.
>
> BLACKOUT

I WANT TO CONSIDER THIS PLAY on what seems to me its most interesting level: that is, as a fiction about a group of people so *different* from us, while in certain obvious respects resembling us, that they are fascinating to watch. As a start, I propose to explore my recognition of the play in this speech which strikes me as being *there* in a peculiar way. It is, first, what we may call a genuine idea in a play that contains almost no ideas at all. Moreover, it is the only place in the play where Pinter permits a character to be undevious, "forthcoming" as Lenny would say, and that is a privilege most Pinter characters never get. Finally, as the penultimate break in the play, it is spoken with an almost thematic inflection. In fact, in the early throes of Critic's Rapture, I wondered whether Pinter wasn't very deliberately telling us more about *his Homecoming* here than about Teddy's.

Basically, the speech is Pinter's only pass at motivating Teddy's unusual capacity to "observe" with "equilibrium" the degeneration (or more correctly, the re-degeneration) of his wife to the

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level of his family. Applying it with a little imagination to *the rest* of Teddy, moreover, we can arrive at a coherent explanation for all of his actions: why he married a girl like Ruth, why he risked stopping off here en route back to the Campus from Venice, why he is willing (anxious, if you like) to return to the children without their mother, thus living out the pattern of his father's luck with Jessie. You can even predict, come twenty years, what intellectual barbarians the children will be, the eldest perhaps coming to a bad end in some dark form of father rejection. A New York psychoanalyst has suggested that Teddy is an example of a "totally withdrawn libido" troubled by a basic hatred for women and a tendency toward homosexuality (a family problem); he therefore substitutes intellectual equilibrium for a proper sex life. Michael Craig, who played Teddy, says he is the most violent of all the brothers, a veritable "Eichmann" underneath who has "rationalized his aggressions." Pinter, with characteristic simplicity (if not pure disinterest), says he walks out in the end to avoid a "messy fight," and anyway his marriage was on the rocks. All of these ideas (see *Saturday Review,* April 8, 1967) do not arise from the speech alone, of course, but the speech authorizes them: it puts the lid, so to speak, on Teddy's possibilities.

My feeling is that it is more a case of the play's not contradicting such ideas than of its actually containing them. Here is the one example of character "psychology" we get in the whole play and it directs us toward nothing definite in the character's experience but rather toward his *way of dealing* with whatever *happens* to be in his experience. In this respect, the speech bears out an impression confirmed by the rest of the play: the Pinter character's complete lack of interest in "things," in obligations, social or moral transactions, past "sins," future "goals," the whole world of palpable reality which Pinter is paradoxically so good at evoking in his dialogue; and his obsession with "points of reference," means, style, what can be *made* out of what is passing at any particular moment. In short, Teddy's philosophy of equilibrium is simply a more academic page out of the old family album.

In a more general sense, this helps to account for the powerful impression of the play's having been spun outward from an invisible center of complicity which clearly beckons the Interpreter to try his hand at supplying objective correlatives. On one hand,

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therefore, we explain the play as a study in psychic ambiguity: under the banal surface a massive Oedipal syndrome (like the part of the iceberg you can't see) bumps its way to grisly fulfillment. Or, beneath Freud lurks Jung and the archetypal: the father-sons "contest," the "fertility rite" on the sofa, the Earth Mother "sacrifice," the tribal sharing of her body (a Sparagmos for sure), the cyclical "return," and so on. But before the play is any or all of these things, it seems to be something much different and much simpler.

Perhaps the best way to pin it down is to try to say why psychology and myth seem unsatisfactory as explanations. The trouble with them is that they bring to the fore a purposiveness which seems at odds with the nature of the imagination we are dealing with. They assume that the play is *about* these things, whereas I think they come much closer to being by-products, as we would be dealing with by-products of, say, a story by Poe in the themes of crime-does-not-pay, or man-is-evil, or even in the mythic structures which I am sure there are plently of in Poe, as there always are in tales of victimization. As for the psychological drives themselves, one somehow doubts that Pinter's characters, deep down, are any more troubled by appetites of the sexual kind than Dostoevsky's people are troubled by finding suitable jobs. They seem far more interested in manipulating the idea of sexuality, for its effect on others, than in their own performance. As for the mythic elements, it is simply hard to see what they prove, other than that Pinter deals in some pretty raw urges, hardly a distinction these days. To be "primitive" is not to be Pinteresque.

I suggest that it is in the peculiar way the story is told and in the liberties it takes with the reality it posits. For instance, if we reduce the play to its main turns of plot we have something like this: a son and his wife return to the family home on a visit abroad. Almost immediately, the father and brothers make open advances on the wife. She seems to tolerate, if not encourage, them and the husband makes no effort to protect his interests. In fact, it is the husband in the end who makes the family's proposal to the wife that she stay on as mother, mistress to everybody, and as prostitute. She accepts (!) and he goes back to their three children. We anticipate that it will be the wife who now controls the family.

It would be hard to conceive an action, in modern "family"

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terms, which violates so many of our moral scruples with so little effort and so little interest in making itself credible. You may read causes *into* it, but the causes pale beside the facts, like the page of repentance at the end of a dirty book. The whole thing has about it a blatant improbability and artifice which depends not upon our sympathizing, or understanding its origins, but upon our seeing how far it has taken its own possibilities. Moreover, it is all so harmless. As Eliot said of Ford's incest, the fact that such outrageous vices are defended by no one lends a color of inoffensiveness to their use. At any rate, the reaction one has to the play comes nowhere near Pity and Fear, or any of their weaker derivatives, but is better described as *astonishment at the elaboration.* And it is precisely this quality of astonishment that is apt to disappear from any thematically oriented recovery of the play.

So the idea I want to develop here is that *The Homecoming* may be about homecomings of all kinds but it is not ultimately about ours. We witness it, it even coaxes us to grope for connections among our own realities (and find them), but it does not, as its primary artistic mission, refer us back to a cluster of moral or existential issues we care very much about. What astonishes about the play is its taking of an extraordinarily brutal action, passing it through what is perhaps the most unobtrusive and "objective" medium since Chekhov's, and using it as the host for a peculiar activity of mind. We have invented special words for this activity ("Pintercourse," "Pinterism," "Pinterotic," etc.), which Pinter understandably detests, but it seems we have needed them as semantic consolation for his having hidden from us the thing they refer to.

And it is, I think, a thing—something all the characters *do* (in this play at least), with varying degrees of genius. To come back to my epigraph, what attracted me to Teddy's "philosophy" is that it offers the best explanation of this thing Pinter has given us. It is not particularly recondite, or mysterious; in fact, it goes under the household label of Irony, or the making of ironies, the art of being superior to things by disposing of them without passion or involvement. The best way to make the connection is to set Teddy's speech against this more clinical description of the ironic temper by Haakon Chevalier:

> The Ironist is committed to the search of a more and more

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> exterior point of view, so as to embrace all contradictions and behold the world from a point of vantage to which nothing else is superior. The indefinite extension of his field of vision to the furthest attainable reaches is implied even in the point of view of the Ironic observer of a simple human situation. The Ironic reaction is exterior to both elements of the contrast observed. And this necessarily leads to a progressive extension of the point of view. Beyond the Ironist's perception of a situation is his Ironic perception of himself Ironically perceiving the situation, etc.

Now this fits and it doesn't fit, and I am ultimately more interested in the sense in which it fits Pinter's own perspective (and he, in turn, the contemporary perspective) than in its application to specific characters. It is a gentle kind of irony M. Chevalier deals with in his book about Anatole France, whereas ours is a more subterranean variety based in cruder contrasts. But it is the same operation, in essence, and as Chevalier goes on to observe, it accompanies a peculiar relationship to "everyday reality" and is "stimulated and encouraged to expression in a special environment." If you wish to think of it as the collective "motive" of the characters, and get your psychology in that way, it would certainly do no harm; but I think it has more aesthetic ramifications. For it seems to me that character is here usurping—rather wholesale—a privilege that has traditionally belonged to the audience (superiority to the situation) and that when irony is practiced to this degree of exclusiveness it might more properly be considered as a form of *audience* psychology designed by the author to meet the expectations of the "special environment" in which he writes, more about which later. This, in my opinion, is the source of our consternation and fascination with Pinter—our quest for the lost superiority of knowing more than the characters who now know more than we do, the very reverse of the familiar "dramatic" irony in which *we* know but they don't. To put it crudely, it is the goal of the Pinter character, as agent of his author's grand strategy, to stay ahead of the audience by "inventing" his drama out of the sometimes slender life afforded him (glasses of water, newspapers, cheese-rolls, etc.). His motto, in fact, might well be Renan's remark (which I also crib from Chevalier): "The universe is a spectacle that God offers himself; let us serve the intentions of the great choroegus by contributing to render the spectacle as brilliant, as varied as possible." To this end, he becomes, as it were, a little Pinter, an author of irony, sent into his incredible

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breathing world scarce half made-up, morally, to work on the proper business of his author's trade—to "trump" life, to go it one better by going it one worse. This, I think, is what Teddy is doing in his repressed, tweedy way in escorting his wife to the rank sweat of the family bed (which she, in turn, negotiates into a still greater triumph of "perspective") with all the possession of someone passing the salt. It is a similar triumph of perspective that moves Max to take one look at his eldest son and his wife, newly arrived from Independence America, the World's Bandwagon, and call her tart, smelly scrubber, stinking pox-ridden slut, a disease, sensing with uncanny instinct that his son is, at this moment, *bigger* than the family, outside it yet condescending to "visit," that his superiority is somehow vested in this woman and that an insult in the form of an imitation (not too convincing) of moral indignation will do the trick. It is, again, another triumph that his apology for this outrage should descend to an equally ludicrous imitation of fatherly sentimentality ("You want to kiss your old father? Want a cuddle with your old father?"). And so on, through his repertoire of sudden reversals of sentiment calculated to demonstrate that his perception of a situation includes all possible positions. For instance:

> He was fond of your mother, Mac was. Very fond. He always had a good word for her.
> *Pause.*
> Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway.

Finally, it is the pleasure of irony that moves the play's least gifted character, Sam, to spit out the priceless secret he has been nursing for years ("MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along") at a moment so right, so symmetrical, that the beauty of it almost kills him.

Pinter's best and most continuous irony, however, arises not from situation but from language, and on this point he reminds me a good deal of Chekhov and Beckett with whom he shares powerful affinities in imagination. Putting aside their differences, I think they are ironists in the same tradition, they hold similar fascination for us, and give us, on the whole, similar critical problems. They are probably the three least discursive playwrights

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one could name; in fact, their silence before the questions they raise—their Socratic smile, you might say—is so extreme that it qualifies as their special *excess,* like Genet's devout immorality, Brecht's social consciousness, Pirandello's cerebration. Such detachment is very rare in the theatre because it tends to produce the sort of play Hamlet might write, one that hovers on the verge of motionlessness (a quality for which all three have been variously praised or damned). Obviously their success with such essentially undramatic materials has a good deal to do with their preoccupation with words, silence (as anti-words), and with what we might broadly call the *expressive* aspect of life. And in each case it seems to me that even language functions in an ironic way, that our interest is centered upon a tension between the words and the situation. I was interested in Richard Gilman's article on *The Homecoming* in *The New York Times* (Jan. 22, 1967) in which he said that "language can itself be dramatic, can *be* the play, not merely the means . . . etc.," a remark which Mr. Simon trounced in THE HUDSON REVIEW (Vol. XX, No. 1, Spring, 1967) as intellectual cant. Now I don't think language can *be* the play any more than the medium can *be* the message, but there is something in Mr. Gilman's idea. I think he touches upon a habit of composition which Pinter has cultivated more and more as he goes along—a habit which is, in a technical sense, analogous to Chekhov's highly controlled practice of putting language out of proportion to the "content" (the almost *elegant* expression of near-suicidal desperation), and which we find again in Beckett's insistence on putting the significant things in the guise of insignificance ("What about hanging ourselves?"). The equivalent technique in Pinter—and especially in *The Homecoming* where it reaches a kind of *tour de force* intensity—is a direct and almost satirical formalism of expression which is, putting it mildly, inappropriate to the situation. The whole technique might be presampled in a remark Pinter himself recently made to a *Paris Review* reporter about politicians:

> I'll tell you what I really think about politicians. The other night I watched some politicians on television talking about Vietnam. I wanted very much to burst through the screen with a flamethrower and burn their eyes out and their balls off and then inquire from them how they would assess this action from a political point of view.

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I checked this on first reading because it was so interesting to see Pinter being, as it were, Pinteresque on a *real* issue he obviously felt strongly about, brilliantly satirizing the politician's habit of converting ugly reality to pure rhetoric—an almost perfect description of what he is doing in *The Homecoming*. Listen to this same politician's language now in the mouths of Max and Lenny:

SAM: . . . You know what he said to me? He told me I was the best chauffeur he'd ever had. The best one.
MAX: From what point of view?
SAM: Eh?
MAX: From what point of view?
LENNY: From the point of view of his driving, Dad, and his general sense of courtesy, I should say.

Or this passage taken from the family discussion of how Ruth is to be treated in her "various" roles:

MAX: Lenny, do you mind if I make a little comment? It's not meant to be critical. But I think you're concentrating too much on the economic considerations. There are other considerations. There are human considerations. You understand what I mean? There are the human considerations. Don't forget them.

Or take the peripety itself, in which the play arrives at its greatest gulf between manner and matter, a small masterpiece of collective one-upmanship:

TEDDY: Ruth . . . the family have invited you to stay for a little while longer. As a . . . a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home . . .until you come back.
RUTH: How very nice of them.
Pause.
MAX: It's an offer from our heart.
RUTH: It's very sweet of you.
MAX: Listen . . . it would be our pleasure.

Altogether, it is an irony that disappears at times into pure comedy, reminding one of that old cartoon about the cannibal sporting the bowler and umbrella of the English gentleman he is about to eat.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of Pinter brutality to date is the scene in which Lenny recites his deeds to Ruth, his brother's wife (whom he has known less than five minutes):

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> Well, this lady was very insistent and started taking liberties with me down under this arch, liberties which by any criterion I couldn't be expected to tolerate, the facts being what they were, so I clumped her one. It was on my mind at the time to do away with her, you know, to kill her, and the fact is, that as killings go, it would have been a simple matter, nothing to it. Her chauffeur, who had located me for her, he'd popped round the corner to have a drink, which just left this lady and myself, you see, alone, standing underneath this arch, watching all the steamers steaming up, no one about, all quiet on the Western Front, and there she was up against this wall —well, just sliding down the wall, following the blow I'd given her. Well, to sum up, everything was in my favour, for a killing. Don't worry about the chauffeur. The chauffeur would never have spoken. He was an old friend of the family. But . . . in the end I thought . . Aaah, why go to all the bother . . . you know, getting rid of the corpse and all that, getting yourself into a state of tension. So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that.

Now there is a serious question here as to whether Lenny really did this at all, much less with such terrifying indifference; but that is beside the point, just as it is beside the point to inquire whether the family is capable of having sex with Ruth. The main thing is the conception and framing of the possibility, the something *done to* the brutality that counts. The genial minimization of it, you might say. And Lenny accomplishes this by satirizing his act in the language his "betters" habitually use to sanitize themselves from dockside realities of just this sort. The effect, of course, is to make him superior to his brutality, to the class morality he is mimicking, and to his freshest opponent in what his soul-brother Mick, in *The Caretaker,* calls "the game." In a sense I think the actor will appreciate, life is *all* performance for Lenny, a veritable charade of politesse.

The question is, what does it mean to an audience? Is Pinter our Molière of the bullock-pen? Is he saying that insofar as language is supposed to correspond to deed and intent it is being "spilled," and the entire moral structure along with it? That the Family is taking out its spite against society by imitating it to its own "diseased" specifications (each character being an aspect of, first English, then "modern" decay), and that in order to avoid such corruption as theirs, as one critic has pointed out, we have got to pull together somehow, wake up to our encroaching dehumanization? Or, what seems a more commonly held view,

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that the play is simply descriptive of a condition we can do nothing about, given the persistence of the beast in the genes, but which it is the artist's instinct and duty to portray, in the belief that an aesthetic triumph over life is better than none at all? In short, what does the presence of such Irony, as the very *process* of the play, signify on our scene?

In the *Paris Review* article, Pinter was asked if he considered the world "an essentially violent place." Yes, it was violent all right, he said, but the violence was "really only an expression of the question of dominance and subservience," the repeated theme (he thought) of his plays. There is about Pinter's remarks on himself a very refreshing sense of the craftsman in his shop (or rather, *out* of it, and wanting to get back), and none of the displaced philosopher taking his chance to talk (art being mute). All questions, if possible, are converted to matters of technique —*"writing the bloody play!"* In his remark I think he has converted *our* world into his own artistic frame of reference very thoroughly: a question of dominance and subservience, a "common everyday thing." Reflecting it against the plays, the telling thing about it is its fixation on *the fact* of violence as a kind of source, or quarry to be mined, and its unconcern for the consequences of violence on the human scene. Does it not, in fact, bespeak a certain detachment that comes with accommodation to, or indifference toward, an "old" problem?

Now one might easily invoke here Chekhov's famous comeback to the accusation of indifference—"We don't have to be *told* that stealing horses is bad." In other words, the objective, no-comment depiction of malevolence carries its own power of denial and opposition, its own unfurled sympathy with health. And it undoubtedly does—when the artist *wants* it to and sees to it that the ironies are leaned in that direction. But I have never been convinced that Chekhov wanted it to and that he was not absolutely fascinated by the blackest possibilities of the void out of which Shestov said he created. Moreover, questions of this sort occur: Do we not underestimate the attractiveness of evil? Is not one of the pleasures of art evil's power to arrest for our delight certain bold lines of force which goodness simply doesn't possess? To bring it up to date, could we not be arriving at a kind of art (of which Pinter is our most daring example) which is showing signs of restlessness with its content and is therefore

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shifting its focus from an attention to the content for its own sake (our Absurd "condition") to the interesting symmetries inherent in it?

I seem to be suggesting that Pinter is callously producing what Mr. Wimsatt calls "vile art," art which presents immoral acts irresponsibly, if not with approval and joy (as we are told our movies are doing these days). I am not really prepared to argue that question; but I feel obliged to put Pinter into the context he deserves most and that amounts to considering him as a craftsman rather than a thinker, a maker of theatre out of "accepted" materials. In short, I find the question of whether he sees the world as "essentially violent" about as interesting and relevant to his art as whether, let us say, John Constable sees the world as essentially peaceful. And I would enlarge this idea along the following line:

It would appear that Absurdist violence, like all forms of radical experience "used" and then "used up" by artists, may be passing into its twilight or "aesthetic" stage and that our reactions to it are changing in subtle and remarkable ways, impossible to assess. We know very little about this strange passage in the arts in which moral actions figure powerfully as the content, but we are learning something about how greatly it influences the course of the graphic arts; and there seems no reason to exempt the drama from the implications of Wölfflin's well-known idea that paintings owe more to other paintings than they owe to nature; nor from E. H. Gombrich's more recent expansion of that general idea that it is "the power of expectation rather than the power of conceptual knowledge that molds what we see in life no less than in art." We see reality, in other words, in terms of our formulations of it.

It is not appropriate to develop this far-ranging idea in very great detail here, but one of the ways in which the power of expectation would seem to operate on the dramatic artist is in adjusting his field of vision between "what has been done," to put it simply, and "what is left to do," or, if you prefer, between the images of other artists (in and out of his medium) and the suggestions they carry for further expansion. Since violence is the natural content of all "serious" drama, it seems reasonable to assume that violence (to personify it) goes a progress through the available possibilities in a constant struggle to recapture its

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power of fascination; one of the ways it appears to do this, as I trust the history of drama will show, is to take daring permissions with its inherited conceptions of itself, to become by turns more particular, more inward, more subtle, more "free," more "immoral," more "real," more indifferent, more sophisticated, more paradoxical (a standard device for eluding discovery); to parody itself, to offer as much sensation as the traffic will bear, and so on, until it is finally performing with only a side glance at Nature herself, the reality observed being mainly the already formulated realities of the tradition to which it belongs. Fidelity to experience, moral qualm, truth, these are indeed perpetuated, but in the terms of the medium. Something of this sort seems to have been happening in the later Greek plays (*Orestes* comes to mind) and again in those chain-reactive monstrosities of lust and cruelty of the Jacobeans—the sort of plays, in other words, which our theatre is rapidly discovering as "surprisingly playable" and which critics are busy writing down as remarkable prefigurations of the existential view of life, or—if not that—as clear proofs of the author's disillusion with his age.

To what extent all this is reflective of external changes in moral patterns and tolerances it is probably not possible to say; certainly the interplay is greater than I am suggesting in this one-sided presentation and I am stating the whole case badly in forcing a separation of the insoluble marriage of Morals and Aesthetics. But it does seem to me that the incidence of irony on our scene (and I have discussed only one particular, if not rare, variety)—which has led Northrop Frye and others to conclude that irony is the characteristic fictional mode of our century—might be reckoned in our criticism as a somewhat less depressing thing than our loss of spiritual security. Does it not open also the possibility of irony's appeal as a form of more or less pure patterning, of the manipulation of "experience" into certain kinds of symmetries (the predictable operation of dissonance) which the mind finds innately interesting because (1) it appreciates symmetry of any kind, irrespective of its bearing on human ideals, and (2) at certain times in the flux of art traditions it craves the release of the ironic variation, the art, as Frye says, which has "no object but its subject" (or, as Empson says, the art which enables the artist to say "a plague on both your houses"). Thus, we might theorize that irony has two aspects: it is, in

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the moral sense, a defense against the failure of any single option to convince, the loss of a clear stake in an ideological inheritance; and, in the aesthetic sense, it is a defense against the exhaustion of a set of inherited images. No doubt there is an intricate relationship between the two (if *two* there are); the point I wish to make here is that in such movements there are such things as artists who are less interested in revealing us than in amazing us.

Getting back to Poe for a moment, I am reminded of a recent essay in *Kenyon Review* by Terence Martin who makes a case for Poe's "play habit," the "desire to astonish by boundless exaggeration or confusion of proportions." He is "our one author," says Mr. Martin, "who makes an absolute commitment to the imagination—who releases the imagination into a realm of its own where, with nothing to play *with,* it must play *at* our destruction. He shows us insistently that the imagination at his kind of play is not only anti-social but anti-human. To do justice to his contemporaries, perhaps we should say that what Poe undertook was not to be looked at without blinking."

That is more or less how I feel about Harold Pinter. In fact, with just a little transposing, we could probably derive most of the old Gothic essentials from our play: the nightmare setting, the double vision of the real and the super-real, the lurking fatality and inexplicable tyranny, the mysterious inspecificity and yet *utter* relevance of everything. Even—allowing for an unfortunate degeneration in our heroine—the central Gothic theme of the pale and lovely maiden *dominated* by the inscrutable sadist of the "nameless vice." This is not intended as a dismissal of either Pinter or Gothicism. If anything, it is a plug for art which produces reactions other than the shock of recognition, art in which the very limitedness of the artist to relatively outré kinds of experience and his ability to arouse the precise *sense* of that experience are the things to be praised. To me, Pinter falls brilliantly into this category and it is with considerable respect for him that I subscribe to his own evaluation of himself as "overblown tremendously" by people who "tend to make too much of a meal." This is not at all to deny the good chance that he may come out in the end as the Poe or Huysmans of the Absurdist theatre—a better fate, perhaps, than the one in store for some of our sterner moralists.

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RICHARD STERN

Milius and Melanie

THEY WERE TO MEET AT THE Wollman Memorial Rink in Central Park. A stupid idea, his, and in the unbalanced sentiment of reunion, agreed to by her. If they had even heard each other's voices over the phone, they wouldn't have gone through with it, but no, they had transmitted the proposals and confirmations through Tsvević; it had been Tsvević who'd spotted her in his painting, Tsvević who'd told him he must see her again, and Tsvević who had put in the call to Tulsa. "You must transform your emotional *situation*." Tsvević, an intellectual straggler who compensated in ferocity for modishness, was undergoing Sartre; *situation* had nothing to do with its banal English uses; no, it stood for fixity which choice would shatter.

Tsvević gleamed with false wisdom, his dab of nose, popped blue eyes and ice-colored lips mere service stations for the grey-topped mental apparatus which ran the Language Schools and, for thirty years, no small part of Orlando Milius' life. What counted even more in Tsvević was the maniacally tended flesh whose terrific muscles bulged clothes into second skin. Every morning, in sneakers and sweatpants, Tsvević ran four laps around the Central Park Reservoir, a character known to policemen and taxi-drivers going off late shifts, and to the thugs who worked the West Side eighties and nineties. None had ever held him up: out for gain, there was nothing but gym clothes and flying feet; out for mischief and violence, there were those muscles. Such confidence muscles gave small intelligence, thought Milius, who, seven inches taller and fifty pounds heavier than Tsvević, was soft, had always been soft, and though not weak, for he walked a lot and lifted furniture at his wife's frequent command, had none of the confidence of size or strength. Milius would never appear in the park after dusk, he crossed streets with caution and swiftness, treasured all uniforms and the pacification they promised. A civic coward. Yet it was he, not Tsvević, who had almost a hero's record in wartime, had worked in the hills with partisans, had, if not shot, been shot at.

But he had not had the confidence to telephone Melanie Booler

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in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Indeed, lack of confidence had hidden his feelings about her for twenty years, and even now, when he had at least recognized something in his painting, timidity had slurred identification; she had just looked familiar, an ideal woman, too beautiful and wise for him to have known.

Tsvević had spotted her at once, and, great fisher of feeling, had drawn Milius's old longing from him. "That's your Melanie."

Of course it was. Naturally. Melanie. Who else? On the floor in his loft, looking up at the canvas pinned in light, Milius saw her skating inside the smashed cobalt arcs and gorgeous polygonal blots. Once again the pilot had brought him in safely.

Safely, yes, but into harsh country. Up the corridor, Vera's cabbage soup steamed in on little Hannah's flatulent tromboning; and, in Milius's wallet, reposed the villainous paragraph from the *Times Literary Supplement* clipped out by his London publisher, daggered with a red question mark and airmailed across the Atlantic. It was one of those rare weeks in which Sartrean surgery did not have to go a-begging.

Now, zipped to the neck in his old orange suede jacket, an overturned keel of black lambswool on his grey head, Orlando Milius diverts his nerves from the noon meeting by focusing on the brilliant New York scene. The Skating Pond blares pink and white; little frozen sea fleshed over by sweatered, jacketed, scarfed and capped New Yorkers twirling under the stony smiles of the great hotels, Plaza, Pierre, Essex and Hampshire Houses. Sunday morning, mid-December, yet a Floridian sun has softened the ice to a green scurf which permits no skating distinction but awkwardness: tots skitter, goosey girls shriek, corpulent swaggerers crumple.

Twenty-four years. She will not know him. Or worse, he will not know her. The crowds will rush on and off the ice at noon, and they will be lost in the rush. "To the left of the gate by the railing" wasn't sufficient direction. Had the railing even been here? It was surely not where they used to meet. No, they would walk together from Columbus Circle, skates around their necks, Melanie darkly golden, her body, so shy and full, turned military by a thigh-length leather jacket out of which stuck her beautiful, stubby legs, black in flannel stocking-pants. Large-eyed, quick, shy, but never anxious, while he walked in fear that Sophie would catch them in the Park, righteous in illegitimate possessiveness,

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picking them out with that look which boiled needles off pine trees.

When Vera, quieter than Sophie, but with a fierceness disciplined in wartime hills, learned what he had done, the ice under the skaters' blades would not be cut as often as his heart.

Learned?

Was he confusing Melanie and the *TLS*? No, they were of a piece. There was meaning to the convergence. Vera would spot the common treason. Yet her father, dear old Poppa Murko, would have understood. Did he not want his turgid, scholar's versions of the Chinese tales put into clear English prose? Those beautiful chunks of Ming erotica which he had mined from Zagreb archives. And which now, for the price of a bottle of aspirin, transmuted the amorous encounters of Nebraska salesmen into sensuous pageants. What had he, Milius, done, after all, but clean Poppa's Serbian gunk from those oriental diamonds, polish them up and put them into American settings? With no thought of large profits or glory. Just to make enough for paints and canvas, to keep Poppa's daughter in cabbage soup and his granddaughter in trombone lessons.

Yet he was not wholly innocent. No, he had made one mistake: he'd hinted at the Chinese sources of his books, but had never mentioned Poppa Murko. And perhaps a second mistake: he'd yielded to Benny Goss and Americanized the books: Mei-ling Fan had become Dora Trent, Ch'o Tuan, the eager scholar, was Roderick Peake, the lascivious topologist. "Now we've got us something," said Benny Goss. Yes, Benny, a dagger. Any minute the phone would ring, Benny would see the paragraph clipped from the *TLS,* and with the terrible fear of the cornered pornographer, he would throw Milius to the wolves. To Vera.

To Milosovich and Krenk. Twin canines, he remembered them, sharp, torpid yet turbulent little men, dark and ugly, he could not distinguish their features, or disentangle them. Spittle-lickers of Mihailović, they'd sold out to the Germans, and he, Milius, had had to cut out for the mountains with Vera and live like a block of ice for a year while Milosovich and Krenk drank slivović in Gradisti. After the war, they'd surfaced in England with fish in their teeth (redbrick chairs of Serbian Studies) and now, behind the anonymous authority of the *TLS,* they did their poisonous survey of Serbian oriental studies straying just far enough to in-

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clude "the vulgarized, baroque renditions of Professor Murko's versions of the *Jou-p'u-t'uan,* the *Ching-P'ing-Mei* and the *Kolien h'au-ying* made by neither a Serbian nor an oriental scholar, but by a third-rate American writer, O. Milius."

A day, a week, and Vera would learn that he'd stripped her darling Pop of his rightful possessions, and she would turn him into soup. Ah, Melanie.

Yes, out of his need, as out of the broken polygons of his painting came the dear love of his life, surely that, his Beatrice, his Laura, his Stella. Yes, noble Sidney's precious star, he knew those lovely poems: Stella sees the very face of woe, painted in my clouded face, how she will pity my disgrace, as though thereof the cause she know, and some heart-rending, bulls-eye ending, "I am not I, pity the tale of me." Yes, he was Milius *Pictor,* not Milius *Auctor Plagiarist Thief.* Dear God, what the artist had to become in America. Poor Wilson hiding out from the income tax men to sip his champagne in peace, the poets all mad, spiked on their own dreams, exhibited like Cromwell's head for public delectation, the painters smashed up in automobiles fleeing the ravenous curiosity hounds, poor Jackson, dear Joey. And who flourished but museum directors, gallery owners, publishers? Business actors all, bearing their expensive agonies for cocktail hour inspection or, lacking the gift of gab, for fifty-dollar-an-hour confessors. The artists looked normal, jovial, quiet, only occasionally stabbing a wife or doping their veins, the only workers left, and what happened? Milosoviches and Krenks. Mindless teeth, snapping at air, coming up with artist hearts. *O tempora, o mores, senatus haec intellegit, consul vidit, hic tamen vivit. Vivit?* They strut in Bedford Square, shine in the *Times,* these critic-heroes, faggots, full of hatred or wild, mad enthusiasm, consumers, editorial powers, dressing themselves in the snot of kings, rejecting, accepting, declining, appraising, and we, weak-willed artists, we follow, we succumb, we bend, we take them at their own worth. Astounding them. And they eat us. Oh Milosovich, oh Krenk, shoot me here, shoot me.

And Milius, lost, pushed his hand to his head; his hat, little upturned lambswool boat, scooted to the ice, and a tiny skater, unable to stop, ground into it, and smashed her tiny nose on the ice; blood and screams flowed over the green scurf, and Milius found himself gripped by fierce hands, shoulders shaken by a

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ferocious little man yelling into his face, blissful in his hatred, grateful for his daughter's blood so he could bite the world's throat, and Milius, trying to shake loose, called out, "Little girl. Darling. I'm so sorry. Forgive me. How are you? Little sweets, take a soda with me. At the Zoo Shoppe. Come," and he pushed his yellow gloves into the wild man's chest and, punched in the ribs, began to punch back, what was he doing, here on a Sunday bringing blood out of a child, punching, and then a stout, grey-haired woman in a cloth coat rushed between them, picked up the child, thrust her into her father's arms, stooped for Milius' hat, put it on his head, and said, "Orlando. Orlando, dear. Are you all right? It's me. Yes, Melanie."

The Obiitelj, the Family, that was Tsvević's name for the fifteen, then twenty, then seven or eight of them who met day in and out at the old Tip-Toe Inn on Eighty-Sixth and Broadway or in the creaky three-story brownstones of the upper eighties and lower nineties of West Side Mahattan. They used the Serbian name, abbreviated to Obiit, because Tsvević, a Serb, was the organiser. The others came from all over the Balkans, Willie Eminescu from Moldavia, Veronica and Leo Micle from Bucharest, the mathematics student, Panayot Rustchok, from Sofia, and, from Pest, their great success, Belá Finicky, assistant professor of Oriental Studies at Columbia, who introduced his most confused and beautiful pupil, Melanie Booler of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Americans in the group were usually transients, pupils in Tsvević's language school, Tip-Toe Inn acquaintances or sympathetic types who hung around the Soldiers-and-Sailors Monument on Riverside Drive. It was by this classical preface to the mausoleum of General Grant a few miles up the Drive that Tsvević's pupils met on weekends, here that Milius first saw Melanie. He had already come to understand that what held and stamped the Obiit, Balkan core and American accretions, was failure. Other New York groups, formed at the same time out of similar drifters, foreign and domestic, somehow acquired the motor power which drove them through the Depression and the war into various triumphs, artistic, theatrical, publishing and publicity, but the Obiit foundered in eccentricity, quixoticism, sheer inability to make headway. Milius had thought about it many nights. Why was it? Lack of ambition? No. The Obiit members were full of schemes, personal, civic,

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worldly, universal, timeless. Lack of tenacity? Perhaps, in part. But more, it seemed that American life wasn't ready to absorb these unassimilable bits of the unassimilated Balkans, these fragments of fragments. The Obiit, like their native lands, were the shuttlecocks of established powers. You'd think these people, ancestrally alerted to overreaching ambition and toppling regimes, could have adjusted to American life. But no, hardly a handful survived, Tsvević, Eminescu, and Milius himself. Though he had never been a true part of them. He'd come to earn a living and stayed for Melanie, but always, his persistence, insularity and, yes hardness, had held him to his painting, and this in almost complete isolation from the powerful temperaments already making themselves known in New York, Pollock, Rothko, Klein, Hoffmann, de Kooning. They were unstoppable, and after the war, they constituted the field, their critics, friends from WPA days, preceding them with brilliant manifestos, their gallery sponsors alert to the importance of abstraction in the opulence, anxiety, hedonism and scepticism of post-war life.

By then, the Obiit were scattered beyond reassemblage. The war had assigned them, fed them, broken them; even their bodies, oddly enough, had strange chinks through which certain war and postwar diseases found ready and fatal admission, hepatitis, lupus, erythremic myelosis. By 1948, ten of them lay in the cemeteries of Queens. Who, watching the dark, gorgeous, noisy energy held in the corner booths of Tip-Toe Inn could have foreseen such decimation?

In 1935, when he first met Tsvević, Milius, aged twenty-eight, was living in a bedroom-kitchenette apartment with Sophie Grindel, a severe, sensuous Latin teacher at Stuyvesant High School on Fifteenth Street. Sophie and the monthly hundred-dollar check from the WPA Arts Section were his support. Sophie had forced him into the project. "If you couldn't daub a barn, you've as much claim on the funds as those bums at the Municipal Building." She got her cousin, Sasha Grindel, a painter by virtue of talk and possession of an easel, to sign his form. "That sulky Dutchman dreaming of Ginger Rogers, and that galoot Hammerslough reading Trotsky while the other bums swipe at the walls. Roosevelt stands in back of them, he can stand in back of a real American like you. Talent or no."

Sophie was no admirer of his painting. He was income-supple-

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ment, bedwarmer, audience and chef. While she corrected *ferro, ferre, tuli, latus,* Milius broiled carp, made matzohball soup and tried out pasta dishes. Why not? He stayed home. He only went out once on a project, drove Sasha's jalopy through the Holland Tunnel to a New Jersey Post-Office and painted what he thought would be a fit mural for this center of Washington's struggling colonials, an ocean of English red and black out of which coagulated shivery red, white, and blue streaks. Up on the ladder, he bore the catcalls, stares and jeers of the Philistine postcard buyers. During Christmas, he did part-time work dressing Fourteenth Street department store windows. Most of the year, he just painted at home or on the walls of his friends' apartments. Indeed, it was learning to use this diseased skin of cheap apartments which opened his eyes to his screen techniques and led him to think out his notions of accident-proof painting. The apartment walls were his Paris and his Provençe. Smoke and brick dust now, they were no more durable than the spaghetti alle vonghele of some Tuesday pre-war dinner. Less memorable to that great eater, Sophie. In the morning, when she left, the six square feet above their bed would be a mean green grime; at four, she'd return with her quizzes to a thick garden of color, and would barely nod at it. Was this what Cicero, that canny sybarite, had taught her?

Sophie was not harsh or mean, only intense and fierce. Powerful, nervous, silently demanding, Roman-nosed as her authors, her features dominated the narrow flesh of her face, the subtle lips whose underflap was gripped by powerful teeth when he had troubled her, straight hair the color of a Moselle white wine, full of rich gleams, though sparse; and the eyes like hot chocolate, steaming. They'd seen each other first through an Ohrbach window he was decorating with sugar frost and holly, she, checking out a pile of cashmere sweaters with the volatile, chocolate eyes that soon fixed his. Her underlip drew into her teeth, and, behind the glass, in shirtsleeves, Milius had felt a shimmer of heat. That night he'd gone home with her—there was no nonsense anywhere in Sophie—and, the next day, he'd removed his clothes in a paper bag from his brother's Bronx apartment and moved into her two-and-a-half rooms down the dying street from the high school.

Sophie had no friends, and Milius was too absorbed in painting to visit his old friends in the Bronx. They saw almost no one

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but Tsvević, a substitute German teacher in the school system who, at Stuyvesant, tried to pick Sophie up. When, one day, he succeeded, he found himself brought home to Milius. A shock, but for Tsvević's disciplined system, one activity could substitute for another without noticeable abrasion. Lust stymied, Tsvević orated, planned, organized. He was beginning to roll out schemes of language schools. Urban man was in trouble, flabby in mind, flabby in body. "Tissues feeble, issues trouble." Tsvević's passion that year was Quintillian. "Perfect Man is Man Speaking." Exercise would build up the tissues, recitation of great poems and speeches would do the rest. There'd be no overhead, classes would be in the open air, *"Mens sana in corpore sano,* eh Miss Grindel?"

Over the next months, they worked out the Scuola Quintilliana; notices were inked on the back of laundry cardboards and put in windows along Broadway. The first meeting was to take place on Saturday, March 21, at the Soldier-and-Sailor's Monument. The day came, but no pupils. Only Tsvević, Willie Eminescu and Milius, the instructors. For forty minutes, they shivered in a trough of Arctic air, then adjourned to Tip-Toe Inn to regroup their forces. It was decided to delay the opening for a month, change the name to the *Mens Sana School,* and alter the curriculum to instruction in foreign languages beginning with words for the body and its activities, words which, as the new notice had it, "would be riveted in memory by overt motor activity. $2.45 per week."

Oddly enough, this notice brought out eight men and women on an April Sunday. The next week, fifteen enrolled, and finally, about thirty people, mostly young men and women whose schooling had been doused by the Depression. They met every Saturday and Sunday for instruction in Serbo-Croatian by Tsvević, Roumanian by Eminescu, and in his family German by Milius. The first month, Milius did no teaching, but was instead a non-paying and phenomenally able member of Tsvević's Serbian class. The pupils ran along the Hudson River framing Serbian slogans, bent low to address gruff vocatives to the stones of Riverside Drive, exhaled declensions towards the coppery cliffs of the Palisades.

Milius began his German class in May, four men and women he could not remember and Belá Finicky, who knew German as well as he, but who'd been converted by Tsvević to the cult of ver-

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balised muscularity, and who thought it a good way to be with his pretty young student from the west, Melanie Booler.

Milius fell in love with Melanie during her first push-up. A modest girl, Melanie was not the sort to suck beauty out of the mirror. Her expressions, untrained by vanity, were striking smiles and laughs, the dark gold head flung suddenly back. Intoxicating. That first day, she wore shorts, sneakers, white socks, a loose white blouse. When she lowered herself for the first push-up, Milius saw her cloth-capped breasts enjoying their jolly little motion. Eye snared tongue; correcting her stance, instead of "Man *muss die Beine ganz gerade halten,*" he'd said *"Man muss die Brust ganz gerade halten."* Professor Finicky, at the summit of a push-up, caught the error and divined the source; his eyes fixed hard on Milius, but, too late, Milius was lost.

Walking up Ninetieth Street to West End Avenue, he touched Melanie Booler's bare arm. "You are so beautiful, Miss Booler," he said. "I find *ich bin schon ganz entzückt von* you."

By the sealpool, an arc of fish flew by their heads. Chow time. The great commas waddled, honked, panted, dove, and then such grace, delight, and marvel. Melanie Dube laughed quietly. The powdered grandmotherly lumpishness disappeared into smile lines. Under the specs, the periwinkle eyes, within the gray hair, deep gold shadows. (Ah, thought Milius, Melanie in his mind, the seals in water.)

They walked by the wolf cages, the gnus and ostriches, then north along the chunky feldspar wall which split avenue from park. Melanie talked of Jack, her brilliant son, a wanderer, guitar-player, drop-out and C. O., Milius of Vera, Hannah and his books of which she hadn't heard.

Out of breath a bit, yes, but inside, Melanie and Milius felt musical, joyous. What were years but signs for outsiders? They were insiders, and, an hour later, over English muffins on a couch in Melanie's room at the Hotel Bolivar, Milius, awkwardly, but not upset at the awkwardness, took up her unringed left hand and kissed it.

How could it be? Thousands of hours had not dispersed, but only screened his feelings. Anonymous, cautious, sidelined, he felt singled out, magnified. Orlando Milius, hero's name on a coward's

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heart, oddity cloaked in oddity, he had not looked into his feelings for thirty years. A painter, his feelings were absorbed by the techniques of appearance. No wonder his paintings were strange. Yet one didn't choose the strange, one fell into it. Like birth. (What to do but breathe, cry, suck?) Or the war. There he was, four thousand feet over the iron river, the ochre shack on the lip of the copse, and Vera, Djovan, little Vuk and Poppa Murko with his wooden trunk of papers. Alone, he had felt all alone, and there was Vera, intense, tiny, her cartridge belt across her breasts, her black hair clipped under the astrakhan, and old Murko, dear, snaggle-toothed coot, sitting on those oriental grapes. Ah it was hard. Old Murko could draw roses from a rock garden. At night, above the icing Sava, he read the manuscripts aloud, and Vera's face, above the steaming raka, flushed in the sudden, masculine silence. Yes, Poppa knew his stuff. He had learned plenty from the wily Mings, knew his lungs weren't going to last another winter in the hills; and provided for his manuscripts and his daughter. That was the way life went: Those who knew their hearts arranged the lives of those who didn't. Was it too late? For him? For Melanie?

For Melanie, no. Not from the first minute, seeing Milius punched and hatless, her sweet Orlando, so blotted a mixture of subtlety and confusion, so intricate and awkward. Despite Dube, dear Dube, as far out of the mainstream in his way as Orlando in his. She'd fitted around his oddities all these years, she would not pain him now. But he floated on those depthless oddities, she was only another one along with the white wool socks he wore to bed summer and winter, the collection of snakeskins, the rooster imitation. Poor Dube. His puzzlement underwrote her week in New York.

She had never tried him beyond puzzlement, but she was ready now. Not that she had ever been one to force things. *Wu-wei.* That's what she had learned from Belá Finicky in Chinese Thought. *Let nature take its course.* Sails, not oars, the stirrup, not the whip. It was her nature, as well. Rivers bit away at old beds, and formed new ones. (Did that mean old beds were abandoned?)

Milius walked home through the park at Eighty-fifth street. Provençe. Purple vineyards, silvered olive trees, Cézanne mountains freaked with jets of gold, Renoir gardens, Monet ponds. Oh such beauty. His hands in the yellow gloves tensed and perspired,

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he knew the sign, he walked fast, he must get home. At Fifth, he hopped a bus over to Second, then ran down the block, stormed up the stairs past Vera's call, "Orlando," and, in the loft dove for his paints.

But Vera's cry was not to be shut off, and guilt amplified it in Milius' ears. He dropped his brush. "It's happened." At last. She's found out. Down the hall she'll come, a pot of steaming water in those partisan's hard hands. Benny Goss, Milosovich, Krenk, Hannah, Sophie, the ghost of Belá Finicky, Poppa Murko and the lustful Chinese scribes would sup on his souped-down flesh. It was over. Provençe? Hah. The butcher's knife. "Orlando," called Vera, and then another cry, "Brat. Brat Lando." Another voice: Baritone.

The door whirred. A great slab of man grabbed Milius in his arms as if he were cardboard, whirled him dizzy, kissed his cheeks. Hannah and Vera cooed and leapt at his flanks.

It was Vuk. Cousin Vuk.

He'd flown in today, hadn't Milius been reading the papers? There was to be a reading at Madison Square Garden, the only poet ever to read there. "Not one word publicity and the house is sold off in two hours. Tickets skulped for fifty smockers."

Vuk the Bard, Tito's greatest export, life's king, subsidized for singing what Djilas was jailed for saying. At eighteen, he had told Stalin to his face he was going out of his mind, and the old iron-man, with the Georgian worship of the poet-seer, had taken it deeply to heart. So dissolved the world's miseries in that shark's face with the wise, ice-blue eyes.

Now Vuk, was, as usual, suffering. Heartburn, cramps. He raised his sweater, shirt, and undershirt, put Milius' hand against his rib cage. "Feel, Lando, feel," and in a loud whisper to both protect and excite Hannah. "Weemens is keellink me." Rome, Brussels, London—"incredible"—Paris, Barcelona—*"estupendo"* —even Dublin, two, three a day. And drawing a pack of Gaulois from his corduroys, "Plus fumigottink mine lunks." The hard, narrow flesh devoured by little Hannah and Vera till the shirt dropped. Then, in Milius' ear, "But waddya hell, us Communist mission is focking capitalists." This the shy rail of a boy skiing the hills with his bag and shotgun, bringing back the snipe. Now, in Serbian, he stuffed them with that great cake which was his life: tiger hunting in Nepal, swimming with La Cardinale at

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Porto San Stefano, strangling a rabid camel in Kabul, debating Rumlï in Vienna, frugging in a Siberian igloo. And the erotic Niagara roared: one-legged beauties in the Pescadores, tree-loving in Zambia, a flowerbath in Oahu, and heart-cracking loves with an Israeli sergeant, an Amarillo cattleman's wife, a florist's assistant in Kuala Lumpur.

But Vuk, seismograph as well as earthquake, spotted uneasiness in Milius' laughter. "Enough. Let's walk, Lando. I must get some New York gas to my lunks," and took Milius off to Central Park, where Milius, content to be Vuk's oyster, opened up his troubles.

For Vuk, though, Milius' troubles were unrecognisable as troubles. How could sheer possibility, whether for love or hatred be anything but good? Vuk was delighted about Melanie; it looked as if one could go on a long time. For Vuk, life was a trail of eggshells. That a shell should suddenly churn with new life was a wonder. "And where is this nymph of yours, dear Lando?" He must see her, this wonder of sixty-year flesh.

As for Milosovich and Krenk, he would grind them. If he could face Tito, Stalin, Khruschev and Mao, it would be an eye's blink to crush Serbian scum into nonexistence. He would read them out of the world in Madison Square Garden, pop them into dust in Chattanooga, St. Louis, Winnipeg, and L.A. He would pull them out of literature like decayed teeth, and he would celebrate Orlando's beautiful erotica—though personally he didn't care much for fancy smut—that was no trouble, but first, they must see Melanie, Milius' beauty.

Vera? Vera would understand, appreciate, adore his being refreshed for her. "Like dugs, weemens love the sniff of other weemens on the bones." As for leaving her, well, that was perhaps too much. Life was no coffin, each day a nail, one must move after one's heart, but leaving, leaving was much trouble. He would not dream of leaving his own wife, she was his mother, sister, lover, nurse, why should he leave her, she knew nothing—hah, thought Milius—about his other focking, why should she, she was brilliant, beautiful, had a life of her own, strictly faithful to him, who would need any more? With his shark's smile, insistent, innocent, powerful.

At the Bolivar, Melanie was celebrating reunion with Tsvević.

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Reunion? Tsvević was putting it on the existential line: Hot coffee and cold turkey. In detail. After all, serious advice could not be capsular, look at *Being and Nothingness,* look at *Saint Genet.* He had hardly warmed up, did not relish the entrance of Milius, let alone Vuk. That a Tito stooge, a ninth-rate versifier, a publicity-gorger and narcissist should pre-empt his platform was a bit much. Seldom calm, Tsvević grew into a frenzy of calm. His sentences lengthened, his face grew pole-like under constraint, the madly-exercised body quivered inside the grimy tweed. He was disturbed, yes, dismayed by their indecision. Life called to them, the very earth suspended its course so that they could come together again, yet here they were, locked in bourgeois fears, corpses of life.

Ah well, perhaps, but not that afternoon, dusk and evening: Milius and Melanie are in the Paris Theater swept by the love story of the racing car driver and the widowed script girl, melting as the difficulties of the thirty-year-old French beauties blot into their own. This while Vuk, at Madison Square Garden, dedicates his reading to that great artist in prose and paint, his old friend and comrade-in-arms, Orlando Milius, assailed on the left by vicious Serbian cannibals, on the right by silence and poverty; and while Vera Murko Milius lies on a velvet ottoman, head aburst with Leo Tsvević's story. He, Tsvević, stands in front of her, a sword, vague eye on a print above her reeling head, a Byzantine Christ whose head lies shipwrecked on its reef of shoulder. "Serbian agony," he growls. "Smash these icons."

"Darling Poppa."

"No regrets, Vera. No bitterness. Bourgeois gloom saps vitality. Look up at Leo, darling." Vera looks up. "Liberate Orlando. And you liberate Vera." An iron hand grabs hers, draws her up, they are nose to nose. "You have camouflaged *une mauvaise situation,* chère Vera." His great eyes swim in the red-veined net.

Milius and Melanie drink Cherry Heering in the Bolivar Room, go upstairs and, in the dark, take off their clothes. Sympathy performs its magic fission. The clumsy, creaky bodies understand; they are lovers once again.

Ten-thirty, and Milius takes the crosstown bus, in his hand, a cellophane sack of chocolate kisses from Whelan's.

In the tiny living room, Vera Milius rises, fierce and silent. The

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chocolate obols are laid on the ottoman. Minutes eat silence. Then Vera begins, quietly: the historical introduction, the Balkan histories of treason, epic stories, the long fight for national freedom, the wars, the Bulgars, Turks, Austrians and Huns, the traitors, Djuleks and Mihailovicés, who dog Serbian history. She should have been alert to treason. She should know the grain of the world. Like Milos and Brankovic, Orlando is infected. That her darling father had seen him as a son, that she should have been his prize was spice on the legend. Yes, even as she was, the years of her fullness given to him, Ganelon, Djulek the Bimbasa, Judas. Robbery. He had robbed his only heir. What price was it to come into the world the child of Milius? Sixty-two years of age, treason took a new turn here. And with what? A sugar babe? A gold-digger? A baby doll? No. No, beauty she could understand, flesh she understood, but such treason, no. To salt his treason, his rebuke, he took a woman older than his wife, a rag discarded years ago, a western American woman, with dental plates, white hair, hard of hearing. Was this the madness of abstract artists? That they had no touch with life, the world? Was this the meaning of his treason, that it went against the grain of flesh as well as family? If he'd brought a filthy nag, yes, literally, a horse into his bed, she would have only more clearly seen the insanity of his treason. My God. And he brings me sweets, chocolates, Judas kisses.

Vera, small, dark, blunt-nosed, solid, pours her survey on his head. Powerful, analytic, a great moment, and in English, her second language, her father would have been so proud. Justice, intelligence, wisdom, passion employed to describe, correct, chasten. She ended in a great breath, rose, as high as a small woman could, he imagined her with the bandoliers across her breasts, the fur hat, the knitted gloves in the mountain ice, Vera, the great soup-maker, enduring here his few dollars, making her own world amidst the aliens, back now alone on her mountains, a heroine of family life, out of the sagas. And he, a swine, thief, two-timer.

Milius sat alone in the parlor, heard the toilet flush—Vera allowed herself the privileges of being natural—he crushed a piece of candy, the stain was beautiful, he would put it on canvas. He sat brooding, and then, bored, and tired; but there was only the other side of their bed. Did he dare?

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Yes. He went in. She was, of course, awake. Could pain advertise itself in sleep? He took her breaths as whips, undressed, ashamed of his body's ease, put on his pajamas, did not dare empty his bowels, only allowed himself to urinate, ashamed even here of relief, brushed his teeth so his breath would not add offense, crept around to the other side of the bed, undid his pajama-string for more ease, slid under the quilt. "Forgive me, please, dear Vera. I'm so weak a man. Please forgive me."

She had often rebuked him for ease of sleep while her ears seined the city's riot. He tried not to sleep before she did, but once again, his body triumphed, and he snored, terribly. Vera then could sleep herself, certified by the criminality of his noise.

The next morning brought great changes. Via a telephone call at six-thirty. A reporter, then another, then the Yugoslav Embassy, then the State Department.

It was Vuk. But by mischance. Life had caught up with him. The cake had its worms. He was in Lenox Hill Hospital, skull crushed, sure of recovery but in a bad way. The reporters were chronicling his New York day. The feature seemed to be one Orlando C. Milius, American painter and author, whom Vuk had visited in the afternoon and extolled at Madison Square Garden a couple of hours before he had been mugged, slugged, robbed and left for dead.

For most of the day, Milius smoked in the blaze of contemporary publicity. Pen, mike and camera elicited every available piece of his body, every cent of his income, every stage of his life. By noon, he had watched himself on television and read about himself in the early editions with the happy puzzlement of a child seeing a drop of water under a microscope. "So this is Milius, this mass of warts, this lump of crystals, this strange being who has been given my name." He was described as "handsome and distinguished," "faded and undistinguished," "a youthful sixty," "an elderly man," "a famous painter," "an unknown poet," "a war-hero and scholar," "an unemployed language teacher." He could not wait to cart his new lives over to Melanie.

She, unaware of his fame, had sat all day at her window, watching a veil of cobalt sleet lift from the city, seeing the dendrite ache of Central Park trees, day-dreaming the strange turn in her life.

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Orlando, my dearest, no sleet with you. Our autumn is harvest time in dear New York, sweet nature's town.

Milius, arriving at six, was almost an intruder. She had to shake herself from the day's cocoon, face up to his excitement and great news. The Willeth Gallery had made overtures, his first show in a major gallery; Benny Goss, voice full of gold instead of rage, had planned new editions, translations, campaigns for awards, critical conferences, the literary works.

Night edged dusk, Orlando wore down. Too much. The variety and speed were too much. Their embrace was static, the amorous focus blurred. "We must go out," he said. They studied the movie section. *Blow-Up* had just opened at the Plaza. "That's our dish."

In his fine chesterfield, bought years ago in the Gramercy Thrift Shop, riding downtown beside his lovely Melanie, holding a newspaper which carried his own picture, Milius felt like a man whose rich personal life was of public concern.

In the dark of the Plaza, watching the two chippies wrestle each other naked on the purple backdrop paper, Milius had an erection. And simultaneously, a tremendous idea. He would paint screenlessly. He would lay clear, intricate blocks of space events directly on canvas. No subtle schemes of indirection, only direct interrogations of matter, unambiguous shafts through surface forms.

What joy.

He turned Melanie's head toward his and, in the dark, kissed her lips. Nature had its seven ages, yes, but each generation altered their dynamics and duration. He and Melanie were vanguardists of the sexagenarian revival.

Yet, an hour later, eating at a Second Avenue steakhouse, there was another relapse. The peppered vodka and bouillon drinks, the adolescent hamburgers and onion, the noisy, gaseous, prinked-out night of Second Avenue were not the backdrop for resurrected feelings or revolutionary passion.

At the Bolivar once again, holding each other, eyes closed against the sad circumstance of their bodies, loving but spent, half-querulous, half-amused, Milius and Melanie separated in the labyrinth of desire.

Artists, Milius knew, were hypersensitive to their cycles, emotional and social, intellectual and sexual. According to Françoise

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Gilot, Picasso had a daily rise and fall: her job was weaning him from noon blues to the two o'clock assault on canvas. Milius' friend, Praeger, the poet-obstetrician, had a yearly cycle: a fine, productive spring, a frenzied, coruscating summer, then an autumn and winter of uncheckable misery. He himself, thought Milius, had an elephantine cycle: his works took years to come to anything, his passions were lethargic as glaciers, his discoveries immense, but molasses-like in realization. The discovery in the Plaza Theater had led to a week's thick-headed absorption in his paints. Now, his insight come to almost nothing, he surfaced for air. Melanie was gone, gone and he'd hardly noticed. His last hours with her were more nostalgic than amorous, scarcely a backdrop for his painting. For a moment, he couldn't remember if he had taken her to the plane. He hadn't. He had moled it in the attic, refusing phone calls, not speaking to Vera or Hannah, forgetful that he had been, unaware that he was no longer a public figure. Now fog throttled dawn light at his attic's glass wimple. Worn-out, stained hands on his long face, Milius was carved by his ache for Melanie. Seven-thirty. He'd been up since six.

He put on his chesterfield and astrakhan, kept on the lumberman's boots in which he painted and went out. He walked by the great, silent Museum which showed no Milius, into Central Park, up and down the unshaven little hills, across the empty bridle paths, between great rocks befogged into Rhenish ruins. He walked northwest to the Reservoir and waited. A runner passed, another, and then, chugging slowly, lined, gray, pullover limp over his knickers, Tsvević. "Leo," called Milius softly.

Tsvević stopped, took breath, stared in fright. "Who? Where? What's up? Oh, you, Lando." He jogged in place, panting, eyes popped and veined. "Something wrong?"

"I'm so restless. I had to get outside."

"All right. I'm finished. Let's go home."

For years, Tsvević had a woman friend who cleaned his apartment. She'd died a year ago, and Tsvević had not touched a broom or picked up a newspaper since. The place was clogged with candy wrappers, socks, shoe rags, empty tubes of Bufferin, exhausted inhalators, copies of *Horoscope* and the *Balkan News-Letter,* the rugs were plots of dust, months of burnt toast and bacon fat hung in the light motes.

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It was a little better in the kitchen. Tsvević brewed tea, cleared the table, poured into clean blue cups. They sat at the window which gave on a coppery well of light in the apartment house courtyard. Tsvević regained confidence. "It's worked out badly, Lando. Who would have guessed that Titoist monkey would turn you into a public freak?"

"A freak? The picture in the paper? That was nothing, Leo."

"You're wrong. It was everything. Kings have lost thrones with less exposure. You're fortunate you lost only Melanie."

"Melanie didn't leave because my picture was on television."

"Your picture was on television because of the dislocation in your life."

"What are you saying, Leo? Make sense. Don't talk like a foolish mystic."

"Mystic? We musn't be so quickly contemptuous, Orlando. The world has mysteries beyond the scope of J.-P. Sartre. Have you not read Teilhard? Matter has its mysteries, and the spirit is not insensible. All conditions are enchantments, Orlando. The mistake may have been in forcing the situation. Acceptance, Orlando. Our lot is good." He tossed his soaked teabag toward a garbage pail; it missed and spread its grains against the porcelain side of the stove.

Nine-thirty. Milius walks across the park as he had come. The Queens factories have sent their fumes into the risen mist; café au lait. The rocks are lit in the hollows where the crystals mass. At Madison, Milius goes into the drug-store and changes ten dollars into quarters.

In Tulsa, it is only seven-forty. Dube answers the phone. "Hell-o." Milius' throat fills, his heart thuds on his ribs, he can't speak. "What's this?" says the voice. "Jack? Trouble?"

Milius tries to say, "Wrong number," but can manage only phlegmatic clearance. He hangs up, wipes the perspiration off his forehead with the sleeve of the chesterfield.

Two weeks ago, the failure would have thrown him off for a month, if not permanently. Not now. Now he will wait two hours and phone again, person to person. The operator will get Melanie to the phone, then he, Milius, will manage the rest.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

LOOKING AT BALANCHINE'S WORK for the first time forty years ago, not with eyes made perceptive by the professional training of a dancer, but with those of a mere non-professional observer, I found what I looked at—*Apollo,* no less—bafflingly strange and obscure. But continuing to look in the years that followed, I found what I saw not only clear but extraordinarily, overwhelmingly beautiful and fascinating. And there was a point where it seemed to me that Balanchine's powers in the mere manipulating of his medium, the additional powers of imaginaton that he revealed in this manipulation, the inexhaustible fertility of his invention, its unending development and originality, his related powers in music and theater—all these made him a creative artist of the same magnitude as Picasso, and the only one of that magnitude not only in his own art but in any other.

This was in 1947, after he had produced several pure dance ballets —*Concerto Barocco, Ballet Imperial, Danses Concertantes, The Four Temperaments, Symphony in C.* And for people accustomed to ballets embodying a dramatic action, who complained that they found Balanchine's dance ballets meaningless, I made the point that classical ballet movements, like the sounds of music, could be used as a purely plastic medium in assemblages in which they were meaningless, but also in assemblages in which they communicated what Aldous Huxley had called "the eloquence of pure form"; and that Balanchine's dance ballets had provided some of my most exciting experiences of this eloquence. In their succession, I said, they were like the succession of Mozart's piano concertos, in which the same language and style were used to fill out the same formal scheme, but the objects produced were constantly new and fascinating, delighting one with the ever fresh play of mind and wit in the endlessly inventive manipulation of the medium.

What Balanchine has produced in the twenty years since then has done more than confirm that view of him as a creative artist: the new works have given me new perceptions of the nature of his operation and its magnitude. And it is seeing *Jewels* several times again last year—each time with new awareness of its marvels—that has intensified these perceptions and impels me to speak of them. For example the *pas de deux* in *Emeralds,* in which Mimi Paul enters, held and escorted by Moncion with grave ceremony, and makes delicate step after step on pointed toe to the *moderato* beats of the still Fauré music —at one point in the progression stepping away from Moncion's arching body and extended arm and hand, then back to them; at

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another point interrupting her stepping for a soaring extended lift, an arabesque, a turn, then resuming the stepping, with Moncion making similarly deliberate steps around her; and eventually leaving in the manner in which she entered. Nothing like it has ever been seen before; and one can say of it what W. J. Turner said of the Overture to *Figaro*—that "its effect upon the mind is out of all proportion to its impingement on the senses": in its simplicity and quiet it has a sustained tension which builds up a final impact as overwhelming as that of the progression of melody in the Andante of Mozart's Concerto K.467.

And on the other hand, overwhelming again in its different powerfully dynamic style, the *pas de deux* of McBride and Villella in *Rubies*—"the goddamndest *pas de deux* ever!", someone exclaimed, characterizing correctly the intricate involvement of the two dancers in the seeming ultimate in newly imagined inflection of their bodies by sharp, perverse, grotesque thrusts, twists and bends, all contrived to work with, and heighten the effect of, Stravinsky's powerfully sculptured melody, and all fascinating and exciting to see. Again one must say there has been nothing like it before.

But this is what one has had to say for forty years. The *pas de deux* of Apollo and Terpsichore in *Apollo,* the seduction *pas de deux* in *The Prodigal Son,* the Hand of Fate *pas de deux* in *Cotillon,* the three Themes and the Sanguinic Variation in *The Four Temperaments,* the second movements of *Concerto Barocco, Symphony in C, Symphonie Concertante* (this one a *pas de trois*), the *pas de deux* in the Haieff *Divertimento, Theme and Variations, Metamorphoses, Agon, Episodes, Liebesliederwalzer, Bugaku*—about each of these one had to say nothing like it had been seen before. And it is not only about the *pas de deux* in these ballets that one had to say this.

It is not, of course, that distinctive, beautiful, witty, moving ballets haven't been created by other choreographers in those forty years: Massine's *Le Beau Danube, Gaité Parisienne* and *Capriccio Espagnol,* Lichine's *Graduation Ball,* Tudor's *Lilac Garden,* Ashton's *Façade* and *Wedding Bouquet,* Lew Christensen's *Filling Station,* Loring's *Billy the Kid,* de Mille's *Three Virgins and the Devil* and *Tally-Ho* (now *Frail Quarry*), Herbert Ross's *Caprichos,* Robbins' *Fancy Free, Afternoon of a Faun* and *Les Noces.* It is rather that no one else has exhibited even in one work imaginative invention of the magnitude Balanchine has achieved in the unending succession of his ballets.

"I began to move people to music," Balanchine said once of his beginning as a choreographer; and moving people to music is of course what every choreographer does. It is what Ashton—whom Clive Barnes chooses to place with Balanchine as the other of the two great choreographers of our time—did when he made his dance ballet *Symphonic Variations:* he moved the six dancers to the music of Franck's piece for piano and orchestra. But the feeble and inane and boring things one saw those dancers of the Royal Ballet do in

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Symphonic Variations last spring, as against the things one saw the dancers do in Balanchine's *Jewels,* made it clear that moving dancers to music is not the same operation with Balanchine as it is with Ashton. With Ashton there is the music, there are the dancers, and he thinks up what seem to him effective movements for the dancers to make to the music, taking into account what he knows this dancer does and that one does not do well. On the other hand, Balanchine's quoted statement, "I always tailor my work for a person, for a body that moves," as amplified by what others have reported in conversation, indicates that he has with a dancer's body the kind of intuitive perception that some people have with an unknown person's handwriting. These people perceive in the handwriting the personal characteristics of the unknown writer; Balanchine perceives in the body its characteristics and possibilities in dance movement; and these set his imagination in operation to produce new invention—movements which achieve the twofold result of adding to the meaning and effect of the music they are done to, at the same time as they realize those characteristics and possibilities of the dancer in the fascinating new dance character presented to our eyes on the stage. Nor is this something Balanchine does only with his principal dancers—with Mimi Paul and Moncion in the *pas de deux* of *Emeralds,* with McBride and Villella in the *pas de deux* of *Rubies* and in *Tarantella,* with Suzanne Farrell in her extraordinary solo with shepherdess' staff in the first act of *Don Quixote.* He did it in the second act of *Don Quixote* with a boy in the *corps,* John Prinz, in whom he perceived the possibilities of the dance character he made of Prinz in the *Mauresque* in folk-dance style with Suki Schorer.

With this as Balanchine's manner of creative operation, and with *Jewels* and the other marvels as what this operation produces, one realizes what uncomprehending nonsense Clive Barnes wrote (his "Declaration of Love" in the program of the New York State Theater prompted the thought that with Mr. Barnes's love Balanchine needed no enemies) when he concluded an appreciation of the company's achievements last December with the statement that in female dancers "the company lacks strength at the top" because of its stress on youth that "is getting more and more damaging as time continues." Specifically, with Allegra Kent absent, the company's only experienced older dancers were Melissa Hayden and Violette Verdy; and young Mimi Paul, McBride and Farrell "are not yet mature enough to lead a ballet company." The statement was applicable to the kind of company the New York City Ballet is not: one whose repertory includes the great classics—*Giselle, The Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake*—to which its experienced older leading dancers impart an effect that its inexperienced young dancers cannot impart (though I must point out that Paul and Farrell are impressively effective in Balanchine's second act of *Swan Lake*). It is not applicable to the New York City Ballet, whose repertory is largely the works Balanchine has tailored

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for the particular capacities and styles of his dancers—today the capacities and styles of Paul, Farrell and McBride in addition to Verdy and Hayden. Maturity has no relevance in this situation: Balanchine wants precisely what Paul and Farrell can do, and what they do perfectly and with marvelous effect, right now. (A difficulty arises sometimes when what he tailored for one dancer must be danced by another: *Tarantella* lost a great deal when Prinz danced in place of Villella; *Liebesliederwalzer* did when Sara Leland danced in place of Verdy; but on the other hand Kay Mazzo did superbly in place of Paul in this ballet and in *Emeralds.*)

But this was not the first piece of uncomprehending nonsense from Mr. Barnes; and it was not the last. In a later piece about the differences between the Royal Ballet and the New York City Ballet and the reasons for them, Mr. Barnes chattered on about everything but the all-important essential: that the Royal Ballet does not have, and the New York City Ballet does have, the towering creative genius in the arts today producing its repertory.

Whatever the Balanchine eye has seen—American show dancing, modern dance, Scotch dancing, Japanese dancing—has turned up in his ballets. In 1936 he demonstrated in *On Your Toes* that he could use the American show idiom more effectively than most Americans; and last spring he demonstrated that he could go back to that idiom of thirty years ago and use it again with delightful effect in a new version of the famous *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* in that show. In certain ways it was even better this time because he had not only Farrell dancing the Strip-Tease Girl but members of the New York City Ballet *corps* doing movements he couldn't ask the "boys and girls" of *On Your Toes* to do. But Arthur Mitchell's style in this kind of dancing was not as effective as Ray Bolger's in the part of the Hoofer.

To the program that included the premiere of this piece Balanchine added the only performance of *Requiem Canticles,* an arrangement of movement to Stravinsky's recent piece with that title, in memory of Martin Luther King. There have been occasions when music by Stravinsky or Webern that was expressively communicative for Balanchine was noncommunicative for me but the movements he contrived to go with it were fascinating to look at. But this time the movements of the white-veiled figures in changing formations, now holding candelabra, now placing them on the stage and stepping among them, now raising them in homage to the Negro in purple and silver who was lifted high above them, while at intervals a single unveiled female dancer moved among them across the stage—the first time pausing here and there in an arabesque, the last time a figure of mourning—all this, which undoubtedly represented deep feeling for the occasion in Balanchine, presented to the eye nothing that I found moving or that even had the distinctive impress of his mind to make it interesting.

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The other new repertory piece was young John Clifford's *Stravinsky: Symphony in C,* whose choreography exhibited a liveliness related to Clifford's quick, sharp, light-footed, but contained ebullience as a dancer. His best invention, in fact, was the lively activity in the fast movements of the Stravinsky piece: the slow movements of the Larghetto were not very interesting. That lively activity in the fast movements showed that he had seen Balanchine's work; but it included original and effective details which revealed that he had an individual and inventive mind of his own. That someone might find it slight and uninteresting was certainly possible; but that this inoffensive piece should be characterized as "a choreographic monster" in almost a full *Times* column of excoriation—and this by a critic who had pronounced a real choreographic monstrosity, John Butler's *Ceremony,* a great work, and to whom a moderately interesting first ballet by another young dancer, Eliot Feld's *Harbinger,* had signalized the explosive advent of a major choreographer—this was astoundingly excessive, and demonstrated the extreme of irresponsibility attained in the throwing of words around that is Mr. Barnes's operation as a critic.

Of major importance was Allegra Kent's return to enchant the eye again with the exquisite delicacy in *Scotch Symphony* and *Serenade* that exhibits impressive tensile strength in *Bugaku,* and to do this also in several new roles—Valse-Fantasie in *Glinkiana, Pas de Deux and Divertissement,* the final Bach-Webern Ricercare in *Episodes.* Verdy, appearing in *Ballet Imperial* the first time here, enriched and pointed up the movements excitingly with the subtle inflections of phrase and rhythm and the accentuations of her highly individual style. Farrell was fascinating to watch doing the Siren's movements in *The Prodigal Son* so effortlessly and beautifully; but I was disconcerted by her face, to which not a speck of make-up had been applied to change it into the face of the Siren. In addition to the Paul roles in *Emeralds* and *Liebesliederwalzer* Mazzo took on Concerto Op. 24 in *Episodes,* giving it an impress of her own in a superb performance, and was charming in the second *Pas de Trois* of *Agon.* And Suki Schorer, not a satisfying replacement for Carol Sumner in the *pas de trois* with Leland and Prinz in *Emeralds,* operated impressively with Villella in the third movement of *Brahms-Schönberg Quartet.*

I might not have been disconcerted by Farrell's innocent face in *The Prodigal Son* if I hadn't remembered what Yvonne Mounsey had been made to look like. And quite possibly I would be affected as others have been by Villella's performance, and in particular his miming of the Prodigal's anguish, in the scenes after his despoilment, if I didn't retain the image of Moncion in those scenes: in the first, the long progression of movement with a continuity and tension unbroken from the moment he began to sink to the ground to the moment when he dragged himself into the wings; in both, the impassive face that worked so powerfully as a dramatic mask. But in *Bugaku*

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it is the image of Villella's own early performances that keeps me from accepting what he does now. Discussing Kent's performance in this ballet, in a superb article for *Partisan Review* on the company's dancers, Robert Garis speaks of how unemphatically she achieves the breath-taking security of her difficult balances and extensions; and Villella was similarly unemphatic in what he did in the early performances, executing his movements with a quiet elegance that gave him a princely dignity and grace. And having seen them done that way, my eye now rejects the italicizing that makes them heavy, violent, angry—and out of key with what Kent continues to do.

After Balanchine's version of *The Nutcracker*—his wonderful realization of a 19th-century Christmas party and of the imagined world of a dreaming child—it would have been difficult to accept "a child's vision distorted by Freudian spectacles," as someone characterized the new Nureyev version presented by the Royal Ballet, even if this distorted vision had been realized interestingly on the stage. But it was not: for example, the strange idea of having Herr Drosselmeyer, mimed by Nureyev, turn into the Prince of Clara's dream, danced by Nureyev, didn't justify itself by anything done by Drosselmeyer that would account for his becoming the Prince in Clara's dream, or even by an effective miming of Drosselmeyer by Nureyev. And what was true of the changed dramatic action was true of some of the new dances—notably the comedy skit in place of the Danse Arabe. But the *pas de trois* in place of the Danse des Mirletons was fine, as was the climactic *pas de deux* of Clara and her Prince. The few good dances were the only successes of Nureyev the choregrapher; and they were enhanced by the performances—among them the excellent one of the *pas de trois* by Carole Hill, Lesley Collier and Wayne Sleep, and the dazzling one of the *pas de deux* by Merle Park and Nureyev.

His other offering as a choreographer was an effective staging of Act 4 of Petipa's *La Bayadère,* which the Kirov Ballet did here a few years ago. What made it excitingly effective the night I saw it was the performance: the beautifully precise execution of the famous slow entrance of the *corps* at the beginning, the excellent dancing of the lesser soloists, Monica Mason, Georgina Parkinson and Deanne Bergsma, all framing what was central—the bravura dancing of Nureyev, overwhelming one with its visible contained power; and the dancing of Fonteyn, exhibiting not the slightest lessening of the beauty of bodily configuration in movement and pose that she achieved with her quiet elegance.

To what I said earlier about Ashton's *Symphonic Variations* I need add only that it gave me my one look at two of the company's outstanding younger dancers, Antoinette Sibley and Anthony Dowell.

On the one hand there was the absurd overestimation of Daniel Barenboim; and on the other hand there was the latest instance of the

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condescending belittling, by the same critical pygmies, of one of the giants among pianist-musicians today. Having heard Cliburn's masterful performances of other works of Chopin, I was not deterred from going to hear him play the Concerto No. 1 with the New York Philharmonic by Harold Schonberg's statement, after the first performance, that it had revealed Cliburn's lack of understanding of how this work that was intended to show off the pianist's virtuosity had to be played. And I was not surprised by the great performance I heard—elegant in its grandly impassioned sculpturing of melody and also in the properly scaled execution of the interludes of brilliant passage-work that demonstrated Cliburn's understanding of what Schonberg didn't understand: that one doesn't play such passage-work in a concerto of Chopin as one plays the passage-work in a concert of Liszt. But it wasn't only the *Times* critic who misinformed his readers about the performance: a couple of weeks later the critic of *The New Yorker,* a professionally trained musician from whom one would expect the perception and understanding Schonberg lacks, wrote that Cliburn's performance had been "a bit glib, with . . . no profound understanding of the Chopin style," and that "though Mr. Cliburn still has some of the attributes of a first-rate romantic pianist" and is technically brilliant, "he hasn't got the more refined nuances of his work within his grasp."

Schonberg's review of the Rome Opera's first performance of the Visconti production of *The Marriage of Figaro* in the Lincoln Center Festival did, however, cause me to consider not traveling back to New York for a later performance. One could, I thought, accept the purely factual details of the staging that Schonberg reported: that Visconti had had action going on at every moment; and in particular that Susanna, in the first act, had engaged in constant activity with an iron—a 17th-century rather than an 18th-century iron, incidentally, "for Visconti has set the action a century earlier than Mozart envisaged it"—which she had kept brandishing to cool and using to iron sheets during Cherubino's and Figaro's arias; and "when she was not ironing she was walking around, looking into the linen closet, doing this and that," distracting the audience's attention from the singing. This sounded bad; but on the other hand the fact that the production presented "an Italian rather than Austrian 'Figaro'" left me undisturbed: Visconti, in an interview, not only had pointed to "the Italian libretto by an Italian after a French play," but had said he had been guided by the music; and, in Tovey's words, "Mozart's whole musical language is . . . the language of comic opera"—i.e. Italian comic opera: "The language of the opening of the G minor Symphony is much the same as that of the [Overture to Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*]." I had reason to doubt Schonberg's statement that Giulini's conducting had produced awkward orchestral balances, ragged ensemble like that of a provincial company, questionable style of singing —all of which added up to an entire *Figaro* "unlike anything New

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York has been accustomed to" (not a bad thing if it was unlike the Metropolitan *Figaro* of recent years conducted by Rosenstock). But since Giulini, after recording a superb *Don Giovanni* some years ago, had recorded a disappointing *Figaro,* it was possible that "at the final curtain there was a rather cold reception, the only real warmth going to Mr. Giulini. There were even a few boos." If, therefore, there had been only the *Figaro* I might have decided not to come back; but since there were also productions of two unfamiliar operas, Rossini's *Otello* and Verdi's *I Due Foscari,* I decided to make the trip. And a good thing too; for if I hadn't I would have missed the most distinguished and effective staging of *Figaro* I have seen anywhere, and the best-conducted musical performance of it that New York has heard in years.

There were, first of all, the superbly imagined sets of Visconti and Filippo Sanjust—the most extraordinary in conception and in service to the action being the one for Act 3. Designer-director teams have transferred Act 2 of *La Traviata* to a garden, or Act 3 to a courtyard, not only without any imaginable gain, but with evident loss. But Visconti's transfer of Act 3 of *Figaro* from the specified drawing room to a spacious loggia worked advantageously for the action. With cloths shutting out the sun, the loggia was placed diagonally with a sharp bend at the left that created a set-off space where the Count could overhear Susanna and Figaro without being seen; and for the finale the cloths were drawn aside, revealing the late-afternoon scene outdoors, from which the peasant friends of the bride and groom came in to embrace them, to bow respectfully to their lord and lady, to dance a fandango. This was part of the intelligently conceived stage action throughout—action carefully thought out to individualize the characters, in addition to differentiating the earthy low-class from the aristocrats. And most of these characters were effectively realized: above all the Count by Tito Gobbi, with his extraordinary powers of presence and projection on the stage, and Susanna by Graziella Sciutti, but also Figaro by Rolando Panerai and the Countess by Ilva Ligabue. The one major exception was the Cherubino of Bianca Maria Casoni, who began with the handicap of her bulky figure and added to this an excessive amount of feminine rather than boyish pouting, flouncing and foot-stamping. This—whether it represented Visconti's direction or merely his tolerance—constituted one flaw in his great production; and the other was the one fact Schonberg reported correctly—that Marcellina did everything but listen to what Don Bartolo was singing to her, that Susanna did the same thing when Cherubino was singing to her and Figaro was singing to Cherubino, and that Susanna and the Countess kept whispering to each other during Cherubino's song. What Schonberg didn't add was that this happened only in these few instances, and therefore flawed only a small part of the production. On the contrary, he referred to the activity during the arias as though it had been a general error through-

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out the opera—"one of the troubles with Mr. Visconti's 'Nozze di Figaro'" which made it "not my dream of 'Nozze di Figaro'." His long paragraph on his one major example turned out to be an enormous exaggeration of what Susanna actually did with the iron: I saw her iron a sheet for a few moments and change the iron once; and someone who had attended the opening performance said she had done no more that time. Incorrect also was Schonberg's statement that Visconti had set the action a century earlier than Mozart: the characters wore the late-18th-century clothes of the Spaniards in Goya's paintings.

As for the musical performance, Giulini had a mediocre orchestra and the usual mixed bag of principals: two excellent singers, Sciutti and Casoni, and for the rest Panerai, with a once fine voice that had hardened and roughened, Gobbi, who managed to do a great deal with the little that remained of his voice, and Ligabue, whose voice was unattractive and explosive in the Countess's two arias, but agreeable and better-used in the ensembles. But he had the authority and musical feeling that got the orchestra to play with energy, precision and sensitive phrasing, and held orchestra and singers together in a progression which had liveliness, grace and expressive warmth (I would fault him only for not pausing a moment before the sublime *"Contessa, perdono"*). I heard no raggedness of a provincial company, no questionable style of singing; nor were these heard by the person who had attended the opening performance. And at that performance he witnessed not the cold response and boos of the audience that Schonberg reported, but the same enthusiasm that I witnessed at the final performance: increasingly warm applause for Giulini before each act; increasingly enthusiastic applause after each act; a prolonged demonstration after the last act; no boos. I heard a woman in front of me exclaim to her neighbor: "There was not a single boo! Not one!"; and a friend who had been at the second performance told me that as he got up at the first intermission, in a glow over the performance, he said to his companion: "Schonberg is an ass"; whereupon others pushing up the aisle turned to him in a chorus of agreement: "Yes! He is!"—evidence of the indignation and anger among musicians and music-lovers over Schonberg's review of this memorable presentation.

I could appreciate Giulini's powers because in the performance of Rossini's *Otello* the night before I had heard the lifeless playing the orchestra did when conducted by Carlo Franci (under whom, said Schonberg, "the orchestra sounded more alert and confident than it had at the opening 'Nozze di Figaro'"). The opera had astonished me at a performance by the American Opera Society years ago with its revelation of what Rossini was capable of when he wrote serious music (even for a travesty of Shakespeare's play)—the power of the slow introduction of the overture, the melodic beauty and the dramatic force of much of the vocal writing. This time I was surprised by the

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allegro of the overture, which was in the absurdly unsuitable style of Rossini's overtures for his comedies—an example of Rossinian carelessness that was the more incomprehensible for the care which was evident in the writing after the curtain rose, especially in what Rossini contrived for the orchestra in expressive support of the vocal writing —a notable example being the orchestra's powerful rhythmic figure in the final duet of Otello and Desdemona ("none of the material in 'Otello' is memorable," said Schonberg, pointing out that at "the big moment—the final confrontation of Otello and Desdemona" the music was "a reminiscence of the 'Calunnia' patter-song aria from " 'The Barber of Seville' "). The work suffered from the insensitive bawling of the two tenors and their insufficient agility in florid passages; but Virginia Zeani sang Desdemona's music impressively. And there was the pleasure of seeing this old-fashioned opera in a properly old-fashioned production whose scenery was given an acceptable modern look by De Chirico.

Verdi's *I Due Foscari* was conducted much better by Bruno Bartoletti, but sung worse, especially by the tenor Renato Cioni; and the worse the singing—which is to say, the louder he yelled—the greater the audience's enthusiasm. The production didn't provide the prescribed scenes for the action, but instead made the action fit into a modern single stage construction in which it did not fit. But it didn't keep one from hearing the individuality and power that Verdi imparts to this early writing in which he still operates in accordance with the conventions of the period.

A couple of months before the Rome Opera, Renato Fasano's Piccolo Teatro Musicale of the City of Rome gave several performances of two programs in Carnegie Hall—one offering Cimarosa's *Il Maestro di Cappella* and Rossini's first opera, *La Cambiale di Matrimonio,* the other Paisiello's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia,* a setting of the same libretto that Rossini set thirty-five years later. A small portable stage occupied the center of the Carnegie Hall stage; and at the left was Fasano's small Collegium Musicum Italicum, which included his more famous Virtuosi di Roma. Into the superb orchestral contexts he produced with this instrumental group Fasano fitted the excellently styled singing he obtained from the singers, in delightful performances which made even Paisiello's musically thin work enjoyable, and which achieved highly effective realizations of the more substantial Cimarosa piece and the Rossini opera that exhibited the Rossini style astonishingly full-grown in this first example. Of the singers only the baritone Sesto Bruscantini was well-known here through recordings of operas; and though the superb voice on the records had lost some of its beauty, it was still an excellent instrument for the impressive dramatic gifts that Bruscantini exhibited in his solo *tour de force* in *Il Maestro di Cappella* and in the performance of Rossini's *La Cambiale.*

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VERNON YOUNG

Children and Fools

Ole Dole Doff[1] IS A DAMNED SILLY TITLE for a movie, even in Swedish. Our equivalent would be *Eeny Meeny Miney Mo* (which is no improvement) and the subject of the story (from a novel by Clas Engström, *The Island Sinks*) is the ordeal of an elementary-school teacher, Mårtensson, under daily saturation bombing from the little bastards in his charge. A howling nightmare opens the film: a classroom-full of juvenile monsters facing *us,* the teacher—coldeyed, defiant, beyond appeal—drumming with their desk-lids in unison, unreachable as only the insane or a congregation of hostile kids can be. At this hour of history, the sequence is an unhinging predicate. Here is the hive of the near future, one is bound to reflect. In seven years, Mårtensson's pubescent mob, trailing clouds of glory, (what?) will be storming administration buildings and planting red flags on opera houses—unless, which is more likely, the exertions of their present seniors go so far as to invoke a counter-tyranny, in which case you'll see a decade of collegiate suppression comparable to Russia's under Nicholas I. Actually, by comparison with the delinquency pictured in such films as *The Blackboard Jungle,* the Swedish version is this side civility. Until the end of the film, these babies do nothing more violent than pelting Mårtensson with snowballs. Their war is waged with familiar weapons: daily resistance and baboonery. Mårtensson has been whipped to a standstill, in class and at home, and here the film suffers, I think, from its own honesty. For it is not, when all is said and seen, an indictment of permissive educational theory, as its producer and author announced; it's an uncommonly painful closeup (amplified by Troell's success in preventing Per Oscarsson from *acting*) of a man destroying himself because he's sentimental. He can't reconcile his wistful vision of what children might be with what, in effect, the brats in his homeroom mainly are—and it's clear that they're partly what they are because he's but half a man; we have to take on trust that he was ever more. His predicament, in any case, which he tries to rationalize by seeing the children's side (a vague conviction that they're created by the "system"—yet he's a unit of the system, is he not?), involves his becoming impotent with his wife, since in the very

[1] Jan Troell's second feature-length film. Awarded the Golden Bear at the 18th International Film Festival, Berlin, 1968. His first film, *Here Is Your Life* (see THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XX, No. 2, Summer, 1967) has not yet, as I write this footnote, been released by the American distributor. For the English-language market, I suggested replacing Ole-Dole-Eeny-Meeny with *Rebel Behind the Desk* (it cuts two ways).

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idea of procreation he finds so little cause for carollings. She, fretful beast, waits just so long and not a breakfast longer, then leaves him to sweat out his vigils and his nine o'clocks on his own.

I'm sure that at the first screening (under informal conditions, with long discussions between reels) I was eager to be impressed. I respond crucially to Troell's marvelling attention to the life in fugitive things, people and places. He has a special feeling for those suspended seconds when one is forcibly diverted from overpowering anxiousness by the wonder of simply being alive—noting the weather-wise tree, the bird dancing for a crumb, the violin arpeggio down the street with which an unschooled simpleton is trying to breach heaven. His shooting and editing of the film were alike drastic: he used a 16mm. camera (we see a blown-up print, which means modified definition of the image); he frequently concealed the details of a scene from the children who were to participate, in hope of catching authentic reactions; he cut the film disharmonically, to emphasize the confounding zone where reality and hallucination merge. On second viewing, in the impersonal milieu of a cinema, I found that this jagged, documentary way of seizing the neuralgic moment vexed my concentration. Objectively considered, there was a more serious defect, as I hinted above. Mårtensson is in a false relationship to life; his real problem is not the one we're invited to believe in—and I couldn't help thinking that any "foreigner" might reasonably ask the damaging question: Why doesn't he find a more suitable job? (Another aspect of the situation a non-Swedish audience may construe to be false is the cool desertion of the teacher by his wife. There, the author was not stacking his cards against Mårtensson. Swedish wives and husbands do not customarily turn to each other for consolation when under stress of personal grief. On neither side would consolation be expected!) Still, we're closer here by far to life of some order than we are with Bergman's *Vargtimmen* released the same winter. Since I shall have to try dealing solemnly with that film in my book on Bergman, I shall only remark now that I am unaffectedly amazed by anyone having taken it seriously. Who's Afraid of Ingmar's Wolf?

As if designed for contrast, there's a film of André Cayatte in circulation, also about the near extinction of a teacher victimized by his pupils (vixens only)—*Les Risques du Métier* ("Occupational Risks"). And with the long tracking shot that initiates the disaster—a girl about fourteen sobbing as she runs through the narrow streets of a provincial town—we may well settle back, knowing Cayatte, murmuring to ourselves, "Let us endure an hour and see injustice down," yet we experience no such intravenous shock of reality as Troell administers. What we see thereafter is theatre, plausibly mounted and juridically certified—but constructed from the outside. The teacher in the Cayatte film is not a sponge filled with vinegar, that's the root of his trouble; he's too attractive for safety; as the action gets under

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way he is accused in rapid succession of having molested two girls in his class. Before he can assimilate the all but comic enormity of these accusations, a third child testifies against him, whereupon the bourgeois community rises to crush him with that most vindictive instrument fashioned by Western man—French law. Nothing more finely distinguishes the tone of this film, at its best, from that of *Ole Dole Doff* than the relationships of the adults to each other and to their children. The Swedish parents are on the periphery, stony and diffident. The French are concerned; where they're not cruel out of fear they're decently inquisitive. Moreover, the teacher (Jacques Brel, who combines force with charm) fights back, supported by his intensely sympathetic wife (played with ladylike confidence by Emmanuele Riva). It is in fact she who wittily points out that if he were a father (they are childless) he would not be eligible as a Don Juan in the fantasies of the children; nor would his guilt be assumed so readily by the citizens of the town. Being female, and beset, she has her own hour of uncertainty when the evidence seems too ponderous to be wholly fiction. But she rallies, and it's she who applies to the conspiratorial girls the psychological pressure that eventually frees her husband from the ruinous prospect of imprisonment and professional disgrace.

All this has the somewhat dry interest of a well-briefed detective story. One praises Cayatte for the sobriety that leads him to suppose that intelligence is enough. But it is not. He has something to say—that's bracing—but most of the time one feels he could say it as well in a novel or on stage. His films are seldom as effective as their intellectual design suggests. This one suffers by comparison not only with *Ole Dole Doff* (Troell's method does at least establish a felt psychic combat between Mårtensson and his choir of prosecutors) but also with *Term of Trial,* made in England a few years ago (with Olivier and Signoret); it is strangely less sensual than the English film and terminates with no such subtly outrageous irony. Cayatte is characteristically indifferent to moviemaking as an art. Most of this film is shot with confrontation sequences linked by cutbacks that merely illustrate what has already been verbally summarized. No doubt someone in the studio mistakenly tried to renovate his approach. "*Quand même, monsieur,* one no longer makes cinema in this mode! You must fracture the time sequence in some captivating way!" So Cayatte tried fracture, gratuitously, and included a few frozen shots just to show that he could keep up with the "tradition" established yesterday by those then under thirty. Hour of the wolf, indeed? Hour of the sheep!

In *Mouchette* (novel by Bernanos, film by Bresson) the balance is redressed—or should I say that the imbalance is perpetuated?: a *child* is sacrificed. Mouchette, a village girl in her early teens, is everyone's scapegoat for no mundane reasons researched by the film,

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though it's an acute insight on the part of Bernanos (I assume) that whether or not Mouchette was once a blameless vessel she can now hold her own in spitefulness. Persecution has a way of shaping its victims so that they become indistinguishable from their persecutors. Mouchette's father clouts her, the boys shout dirty words at her, the music teacher humiliates her, the girls shun her (she retaliates with rocks and imprecations), the shopkeeper, an elderly woman, appears to have obscene reasons for giving her coffee and Arsène, an epileptic, violates her—if not entirely against her inclinations. Penelope Huston once summarized the Bresson world in a paragraph which would be difficult to match. Part of her conclusion was that Bresson takes his characters "on a series of spiritual journeys without signposts. . . . Driving himself, his characters, his audience, he imposes his view of where man stands in relation to God: a Bresson film is an exercise of will in which the only victory is surrender." I think the key word here is *imposes,* for it is notable that those who claim to love God so jealously (Bernanos, Bresson, Greene, Bergman) cannot permit man to get the better of Him; in their zeal they normally contrive a world over which He could not possibly be thought to preside!

If I had never before seen a Bresson film, I might have been moved deeply by *Mouchette* (it is one of the purest and most integrated films of the last year or so). My consent was considerably diminished by my awareness that I was seeing an all too familiar rehearsal of Bresson's increasing determination to leave no stone unturned that has a toad beneath it. Paradoxically, his style has become more flexible while his metaphors remain limited. After the Joan of Arc film he must have realized that he might just as well compose a movie of still shots (as Chris Marker did in that tiresome experiment, *The Terrace*). With *Au Hasard, Balthazar,* he displayed a new resiliency. I enjoyed that film: the sensitivity to setting, the social complexity within the rural compound, the shifting elites of moral depravity; even the donkey as an epitome of passive suffering. *Mouchette* is no less supple, visually, but the animal motifs are obtrusive and frequently irrelevant. Arsène snaring a bird during the opening footage is clue sufficient to the fate of Mouchette; but you can't with any sense of reality go on to employ the shooting of rabbits as a symbol of universal voracity if you're depicting a region where rabbit is a basic source of food! This is not the first time that I've had the suspicion, when watching a film of this derivation, by Bresson or not, that what I'm witnessing is not so much the inhumanity of man as, quite simply, the inhumanity of certain French provincials.

A touch of inhumanity would have been sanguine relief in the pseudo-Fragonard surroundings of *Benjamin.* For the benefit of anyone who finds good clean fun in psychoanalyzing the critic, I'll confess that I left the theatre after *Benjamin* mumbling, "Don't make love, make war!" This is the sort of French product that brings out all the

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Anglo-Saxon in me. It would appear to have been sponsored by Air France to entice aging American lesbians and British teen-agers to chateaux on the Loire. Michel (of course) Deville is the director. I know nothing of him but I'll risk the conviction that he spends much of his time dreaming he's a girl's bicycle seat. His film is "about" an eighteenth-century teenager sent to a country estate, roughly the size of Versailles, in order to advance his sexual education. There he is forever being stripped, bathed and caressed by a backstairs sorority of giggling cocottes (none of whom stirred my Adam); concurrently, an aging but potent goat is incomprehensibly in hot pursuit of an animated marshmallow (Catherine Deneuve). Since the boy (Pierre Clementi) was represented as toothsome, the man (Michel Piccoli) as irresistible and the marshmallow as eminently desirable, I was personally left with nobody to whom I could attach my credulity. I detest Clementi more than any juvenile in European film (saving only Tommy Berggren, perhaps) and I was embarrassed by Michel Piccoli attempting what I would probably accept without discomfort from Vittorio De Sica, who is perhaps fifteen years older than Piccoli. Ostensibly I was seeing a comedy but I was never tempted by mirth. Nor have I a steeled antipathy to rococo; the Watteaus in Berlin, Vierzehnheiligen, the suites of Couperin armoured with harpsichords, are prominent in my anthology of select experiences. I am simply not aroused by peekaboo pornography at the cinema, no matter in which century it avowedly takes place. I've had to face the fact, brought home to me by the movies, that some of my best friends are voyeurs. I remain unamused by actors and actresses who fumble at each other's buttons and ribbons and proceed to lick, sniff and nuzzle while the emotionally starved spectator pets his invisible neighbor or stuffs chocolate into his mouth with nervously sweating hands. This film is the sort of thing Clemenceau had in mind, I suppose, when he told the French—"Your end will be delicious—and prolonged: it will be like cutting your veins in a bathtub full of milk." I was beguiled into seeing *Benjamin* by a fine-spun description of it signed "Genet" in *The New Yorker*. No doubt her acquaintance with French thought, *mores* and pastimes is more extensive and intimate than I expect, or want, mine ever to be. In this case, I'll make bold to observe, she confused a *peu de chose* with a *pièce de résistance*.

Jeu de Massacre illustrates the distinction pungently. Alain Jessua, who made *La Vie à L'Envers (Life Upside Down)* is nurturing a subject—do not say exploiting, the participle would be too crude—for which he appears to have a unique competence and over which he exercises perfect control: the salvation and the catastrophe of dreams. This, his second film, is balanced to a dram between the unlikely and the just conceivable; intellectual tact, to say nothing of sheer art, prevents the solemnity of the implication from spoiling the fun. Pierre, a writer and serial cartoonist running out of ideas (and funds) en-

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counters a half-looney young rich man, Michel (Pierre and Michel again—you see what I mean), who feeds him with quite incredible tales of adventure in Vietnam, of expeditions to exotic islands, of women by the bushel who plague him with their ardors. Little by little, after first yawning it through, the writer becomes interested in recreating this mythomaniac as a character in a serial, an enterprise decisively encouraged when Pierre and his wife are invited by Michel and his attractive mother to make themselves at home in a Swiss villa, where Pierre and Michel can refuel each other, as it were, and the two women can dote when they're not bathing or playing tennis. The *ménage à quatre* is established; the laws of attraction and reaction begin their insidious work. Michel's runaway fancy spurs Pierre to wilder inventions, and incidentally blinds him to Michel's growing fondness for his wife; Michel is stimulated to real-life escapades in simulation of his other self. As the overlapping accelerates he tries to rob a bank (owned by his mother, as it happens), imperils the lives of a lakeside bathing colony by driving a motor-launch at top speed, robs a jewelry shop and kidnaps Pierre's wife. Finally, in a burst of irrepressible consistency he acts out a suicide attempt and goes through the indisputable first motions of murder. At which point, Pierre is called upon to conceive a quick-witted, sedative conclusion. Each balance-wheel in this lovely, comic mechanism is disturbed; none is finally impaired. Danger looms but keeps its distance, like an unseen beast snuffing behind the window-pane. Pierre's wife is half enthralled by Michel's whirlwind abduction of her; Pierre, himself, is on the verge of infatuation with Michel's mother: everyone recovers. . . . When we're in good humor about the French mind, Jessua is part of what we mean: wit and classical poise seriously at work in the realm of the more than faintly absurd.

François Truffaut should be making films of this quality. That he is not may be attributed to a variety of reasons I haven't the authority to nominate. One source is clear, however. Against our loyal expectations, Truffaut is in no haste to grow up as Truffaut; he's waiting for the day when he can get Alfred Hitchcock's heart, by transplantation. I like thrillers when a master of their rigid art is sensible as well as intricate and hair-raising. If against the clamor of my super-ego I am to find myself in breathless sympathy with bad people in sticky situations (commonly the mainspring of good thrillers) I demand at least a veneer of plausibility in the sequence of things and a show of respect for what goes on inside the characters while so much that is preposterous is going on outside. Hitchcock is no longer the model for such requirements: his grasp of abnormal psychology is that of a parvenu; his indifference to articulate plotting reflects a small boy's impatience with the finer points of the necessary fiction by which grownups justify their existence. Truffaut seems to be falling heir to Hitchcock's negative proclivities, else why should he have recourse

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to *The Bride Wore Black* (from a silly novel by William Irish) which gauchely embodies them, when, in his own language, there is all of Simenon to warn him and, for that matter, the paragon of French ingenuity among contemporary films of this coat, Louis Malle's *Ascenseur à L'Echafaud* (*Frantic,* 1958), more sophisticated and more inexorable than any Operation Hitchcock I've seen for twenty years?

Against that standard, and against the standard Truffaut, himself, maintained in *La Peau Douce,* which had the form of a suspense story, it is doubly baffling to imagine how he could work on such a script as *The Bride Wore Black*—week after week of repeated takes—without being mortified by its stupidity. This idiotic yarn of a mysterious woman intent on killing five designated men who don't even know her is not alleviated by a shadow of the could-happen. Against all unwritten rules of the game, we are informed of the woman's motive after the third killing, which not only dispels the mystery but exposes the feebleness of the plot. (After this, it is out-and-out rubbish.) The only excuse for the premature revelation would be to switch our sympathy from the men to the woman which, in turn, would depend on our being as spellbound by this apparition in white as the men improbably appear to be. But Jeanne Moreau is really quite confoundedly ugly; she looks as if she'd been saved from drowning but not quickly enough to erase the expression of horror stamped on her features! . . . To be sure, there are moments in this film—uncomfy glimpses of the domestic subterfuges by which two of the men (one a bachelor living in a hotel, the other a married suburbanite) convince themselves that they're alive to some point—that suggest what Truffaut might undertake with the comedy of sour manners if, as we have insinuated, he could get introduced to himself again.

The best Truffaut film made *outside* France I've recently seen is a Jugoslavian movie, *Rondo.* I trust this does not sound as if I were slighting the talents of its director, Zvanimir Berkovic; it is intended to express my surprise, in view of the black-humored art I've otherwise seen from his country, at the carefully modulated tone of this perfect comedy (ultimately sad) about two friends who—in an unacknowledged sort of way—play chess for the wife of one of them. Since it seems unlikely that any English-language film distributor is going to pick this film up (the release date is 1966) it may be gratuitous of me further to exploit an appreciation you may never be able to share, or to contest. Yet in truth I can tell you no more without divulging the unpredictable resolution towards which every nuance of the film is beautifully and ineluctably directed. Just keep the title and director in mind—the former is the easier assignment! If you liked *Jules and Jim* and Polanski's *Knife in the Water,* this is your film.

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Reviews

J. MITCHELL MORSE

Masters and Innocents

GOOD NEWS, GOOD NEWS: A GREAT NOVEL. And a humanely witty novel. And some excellent short stories. And some competently written ordinary harmless novels, and some blaring literary equivalents of show biz, which are hardly news. And some pretentious bad novels, which alas are not news either. And two hopelessly incompetent ones, which are news in that they come from reputable publishers. Let's discuss the great novel and the humanely witty one first, and then the hopelessly incompetent ones: these extremes will help us to see what the others have got and what they lack.[1]

Peter Weiss's *Exile* is a great novel. It is not a supremely great novel. It is not of the stature of *Pantagruel* or *Don Quixote* or *War and Peace* or *Ulysses* or *Remembrance of Things Past*. But it would be quite in place on the same shelf with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, The Trial, The Fall, Notes from Underground,* and *A Season in Hell:* those unique unclassifiable odd works, each incomparably valuable in its own way, which we count among our most precious inner goods and which we love as much as the supremely great ones.

They are all mad. The madness of twentieth-century Germany, like the madness of nineteenth-century Russia, the madness of the American South, the madness of Rilke's, Kafka's, Capek's and Hasek's Prague, and the madness of Eastern Europe's Jewish ghettos, provides a richly exaggerated hothouse or rain-forest atmosphere for the production of strange, beautiful, horripilant flowers of literature. In Germany it produced expressionism, which has continued uninterrupted (even by the Nazi period) since—oh, since the publication of Morgenstern's *Galgenlieder* in 1909 and Rilke's *The Notebooks* in 1910, and which is now evolving through new forms with mad vigor in Günter Grass, Alexander Klüge and Peter Weiss. *Exile* challenges direct comparison with *The Notebooks*—a very temerarious thing to do: Sartre's *Nausea* suffers badly by the comparison. *Exile* doesn't.

It is divided into two parts. The first, "Leavetaking," is a single paragraph 88 pages long, dealing with the narrator's childhood and

[1] EXILE, by *Peter Weiss*. Delacorte Press. $5.95. THE SERPENT, by *Luigi Malerba*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95. THE CLARION PEOPLE, by *Audrey Lee*. McGraw-Hill. $4.95. LOVE AND WORK, by *Reynolds Price*. Atheneum. $4.50.

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youth to the age of 22, when he left his parents; the second, "Vanishing Point," is a series of notes recounting incidents, episodes and patterns in his development from 22 to 30. Like Weiss himself, the narrator was born in Germany in 1916, of a Catholic mother and an ex-Jewish father who had converted to Catholicism. To the other children in the neighborhood and at school, whom he approached with unsuspecting friendliness, he was from the beginning an object of gratuitous hatred; even his half-brother Gottfried, when they heard Hitler screaming from loudspeakers before the Nazis came to power, said, "What a pity you can't be with us." That was the beginning of his conscious turning away into exile from society, nation, and culture: "I felt neither surprise nor fear at these words. And when Gottfried then explained that my father was a Jew, this came to me like the confirmation of something I had long suspected. Disclaimed awareness came to life in me, I began to understand my past." The rest of the book deals with his various efforts to understand his present: through reading, painting and writing, through intellectual friendships, through casual but pleasant sex without love, through marriage and parenthood without love, through love of a fine actress, who though she takes him into her bed is incapable of love or any other emotion except as something to be acted, and through various kinds of work: chiefly his own agonizing unsatisfactory experiments as a painter and writer trying to represent his deep inner life and his unique sense of the outer world, but also efforts to enter into useful relations with others in ordinary accepted ways—as a clerk in a store, as a designer in his father's textile factory, as a farmhand, even as a lumberjack.

His struggle to define himself and communicate with society on mutually satisfactory terms is complicated by the psychological unsettlements of physical exile—with his family in London, as an art student in Prague, as an artist, husband and father in Stockholm. The problem of a writer in a foreign country, when the language with which he is most familiar is no longer the language of his daily life and he has no way of knowing that it ever will be again; the problem of an intelligent neurotic who accepts neither the most generally accepted values of society nor those of its enemies, domestic or foreign, organized or unorganized; the problem of a grown man oppressed by a continuing childhood conviction of personal inadequacy; the problems of actual and vicarious guilt; the problem of finding a valid way of art; the obvious problems of an alien in a country that may be invaded (not without sincere speeches of welcome) by the troops of the country from which he is an exile; the subtler problems of a naturalized citizen who regards his new citizenship as nothing more than a formality, since the idea of nationality means nothing to him: all the problems of an unreconciled man who doesn't want to become reconciled to the world or to live in seclusion either: these are what the narrator tries, if not to solve, at least to understand. He wants "to live

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and work in the world" and "participate in the exchange of ideas that [is] taking place all around, bound to no country." Bound to no country. He can overcome the neurosis of exile only by freeing himself of the sense of exile and even of the concept of exile—not by adopting a supine relativism but by developing a serene and self-sufficient knowledge of his own worth. At the end of the book he has done so. His journey to that point is the journey of every man who achieves any degree of freedom on his own terms. Weiss's account of the journey takes us through familiar territory by new routes, so that we see the landmarks as we have never seen them before. He is able to do this because he has so fully mastered his own experience, so fully understood its relations with the general experience of the twentieth-century West, that he enables us to perceive hitherto unsuspected relations among the elements of our own experience.

The publishers tell me that all three translators—E. B. Garside, Alastair Hamilton and Christopher Levenson—worked together on both parts. I asked because the translation of "Leavetaking" is excellent and that of "Vanishing Point" is clumsy. But "Leavetaking" was originally published by itself, and the translation has been revised for the present complete edition of the novel. That shows the value of revision. Here is a representative passage from "Leavetaking" (pp. 15-16):

> Beside the garden path lay the green henhouse, low and shrunken, and once we had jumped down from the dizzying heights of its skylight. The fenced-in hen yard was deserted but a few white feathers still shone out of the dust. I asked a woman who came out of the [dwelling] house if she knew anything about the neighbors. She told me that out of the whole large family only one son was still alive, Friedrich, he had been an outstanding officer and had won the highest honors. He still lived in the town and she gave me his address. But I did not look him up, I knew what he was like. There stood Friederle at the fence of the neigboring garden, it was the day we moved in. He folded his arms and asked me imperiously what my name was. Are you going to live here, he asked, and I nodded and with my gaze followed the men who were carrying our furniture out of the moving van and into the house. Your house belongs to my father, Friederle said, you are only renting it. My father is a president, he said, what is your father. I did not know. What, you don't even know what your father is, he said. I sought for an answer that would overpower him, or win his favor, but I found none. Then he asked again. What's that you've got on your hat. I took the hat off. It was a sailor's hat with golden lettering on the headband. What is that, he asked again. I did not know. Can't even read what's written on your own hat, he said. It says, I am stupid. And with that he took the hat from my hand and threw it high up into a tree.

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> The hat stuck in the branches, the long blue ribbons fluttered in the wind. My mother came out on to the terrace of our house and saw us standing there side by side. Have you found a new playmate already, she cried. Are you having fun.

And here are some representative infelicities from equally vivid passages in "Vanishing Point." "His gray hair was tousled and his face was haggard from lack of sleep and malnutrition" (p. 199). Lack of malnutrition? "With his harsh and grotesque juxtapositioning of invented words Hieronymus transcended the limits of personal thought" (p. 199). What's wrong with the old-fashioned word "juxtaposing"? "When he was attacked by toothaches or fits of giddiness, when he suffered from colic or other effects of food poisoning appeared in his body, he accepted it with a superior laugh" (p. 199). The word "when" before "other effects" would obviate a momentary confusion. "I saw that what tormented him was part of his painted visions, and that it was perhaps more important than being driven into exile, or genocide, or the total destruction of cities" (p. 206). Being driven into genocide, etc? Either "being driven into" should have been omitted, or "than" should have been inserted before "genocide." "But I had already sprung up in consternation as I had done a long time before when, in a theater I saw someone just like myself was to be shot to the moon by a great basilisk of a cannon" (p. 219). "That" should be inserted after "saw"; the comma after "when" leads us to expect one after "theater"; and a phrase that occurs several lines later, "with baited [*sic*] breath," also occurs several other times. But—for a number of reasons that it would be distracting to go into here—few contemporary translations are free of such infelicities, many are much worse than this one, and in any case the high quality of Weiss's work is evident despite these scratches.

Luigi Malerba's *The Serpent* is witty in the eighteenth-century sense: humorous, intelligent, skeptical, urbane, charming, wise. The narrator is or thinks he is a stamp dealer near the Spanish Steps in Rome, who escapes or seems to escape from what is or seems to him to be a colorless existence by indulging his imagination without restraint. We never know where we are with him. Having convinced us in the most circumstantial way of his wife's tyranny over him—a tyranny not cruel but drab, consisting of an absolute lack of interest in anything but housekeeping—he recounts a passionate love affair with a girl named Miriam; and long after we have begun to wonder how he manages to spend so many consecutive nights away from home, he says offhand, "I have no wife, I was lying." Malerba uses this device two or three times—often enough to warn us not to believe anything the narrator says, but not so often as to make the device a gimmick. Everything seems quite natural and almost plausible. There is not a strained or heavy line in these 206 pages, not a line that doesn't

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sparkle. Since there is a plot, I won't give it away. Let me merely point to two high spots—the narrator's account of how he copulates to the rhythms of music (pp. 46-49) and his effort to convince a literal-minded police sergeant that he has committtd cannibalism (pp. 181-193, the chapter entitled "I the undersigned declare that I acted while in full possession of my mental faculties"). And here is a sample of the style:

> I believe in pure eroticism. Sentiment is one thing and eroticism another. There are those who are inclined towards eroticism and there are those who are inclined towards sentiment. It's rare for a man and a woman to be inclined towards both together. In such cases all hell breaks loose.

After such pleasures, what forgiveness can there be for an author or a publisher who offers us such a childish botch as Audrey Lee's *The Clarion People* or such a pretentious mess as Reynolds Price's *Love and Work*?

There are people who think all you have to do to be Jesus Christ is let your hair and beard grow and all you have to do to be the Blessed Virgin Mary is have a baby whose father you don't remember and all you have to do to be Shakespeare or Sappho is have a homosexual hangup and a ballpoint pen and all you have to do to be Joyce is write like John Lennon. On the same level of competence are nice people of all ages and conditions who think there is a sad lack of judgment among publishers because dirty books like *Exile* and *The Serpent* get published and their nice ones don't, and stale nuts who think there is a conspiracy not to publish their dangerously new ideas, and self-conscious dwellers in the House of Intellect who undertake to produce Literature without having mastered their native language. These are the four great groups of incompetent writers. The one thing they have in common is innocence: an absolute innocence of the art of writing. Some of these slugs write plays that get produced, our theater being at a loss to tell the best from the worst; some write poems that get published in magazines or broadside series run by people like themselves, and some write novels or short stories and have them printed by vanity printers. But practically none of them get published by serious publishers, commercial, experimental or academic.

So why did McGraw-Hill publish *The Clarion People,* which is thickly sprinkled with inaccuracies of vocabulary and observation such as these?—"There is so much movement among inanimate things that you wonder if there isn't some invisible being moving them—something beyond. Something discernible to the intelligence and yet unpalatable to the eye. To the touch." . . . "A leaf perhaps will peep above the ground without having indicated its coming. And then it is a blossom." . . . "A wounded man with frozen blood dangling from his head." . . . "I throw up the hand in my heart with exasperation."

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. . . "The voices in the corridors of my mind dispel and sleep." Miss Lee's heroine is a nice church-going girl who goes to "The City" and gets a job as a secretary and is rather disturbed to find that none of her new friends are "church people" but nevertheless in a moment of cynicism gives her virginity to a pimp and dope pusher and lands in jail and tries to commit suicide and is sent to a rest home and is redeemed by a Christian newspaper homilist whose earnest wish to marry her succeeds in making her feel worthy of holy matrimony. Tolstoy at his worst—in *Resurrection,* say—handled this kind of material with much more art; but even he sank under it; and a person who writes like a college freshman in danger of failing English 1 was sunk before she started. The question is, Why did a major publisher publish this thing?

And why did the excellent Atheneum publish such a thing as *Love and Work?* Reynolds Price has been called a stylist, but the rumor is unfounded. *Love and Work* is about a writer who uses his work as an excuse to neglect his human relationships. That is certainly a fine theme for a novel. Henry James could handle it because his command of language enabled him to perceive nuances of feeling that escape most of us—language being an instrument of perception as well as of expression. But Price's language is downright clumsy. *Love and Work* begins with a metaphor that doesn't work: "The phone's first ring pierced his study door, a klaxon vs. cheap birch veneer." Since when does a phone sound like a klaxon? And "vs." implies active opposition, athletic or legal for example. On p. 17 his hero thinks, "So much the worse for prosperous America, sick with the failure built into its dream (that men are equal, can be equally good); barnacled already, past scraping, with deceit; sinking slowly from the sheer weight of hot air but savagely swelling, a wallowing balloon." Well, is America a ship, or is it a balloon? Is hot air heavy enough to sink a ship or ground a balloon? (It pays to read books: you learn all kinds of things.) And does a balloon or a ship dream and then feel sick when the dream fails? On p. 30 it says, "He was reeling, in revulsion, one backward step before he recovered (and blamed Ida's sopped smile)." Sopped? On the next page he is in a hospital: "Eborn's own eyes crouched an instant—infection—then resigned, looked ahead as the doors slid open straight onto the room, the doctor emerging." Have you ever seen eyes crouch? And did the doors slide open straight onto the room? I suppose "onto" is a misprint for "into," the letters *o* and *i* being next to each other on the linotype machine invented by the great Rumanian typographer Etaoin Shrdlu; but surely there are plenty of commas on any linotype machine, and Price should have put one before "resigned" in order to avoid saying that Eborn's eyes quit and went away (Price often fails to distinguish between the past perfect and the past participle—I could cite half a dozen examples); and another comma after "open" would make it clear that "straight onto" refers to "looked," not to

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"slid." Or are those doors not sliding doors, and did he mean to say merely that they opened? On p. 36 is another grammatical mess: "Themselves and death, in a ring alone—or death the foregone victor; they the witness, menaced but spared, and endured alone." A few lines below is "catherize" for "catheterize." On p. 42 we see a startling sight: "The third van however has gone a different way—up the side of the house, the garbage-man's track—has stopped closest of all, ten yards from the house." Surely he means *by* the side of the house. On p. 49 he says, "Tears, however rare, were instruments of entry—crowbars, shims." Wahp away them crowbars, Honey. On p. 54 he says "disinterest," meaning "lack of interest." Etc., etc., God damn it, all the way through: on the very last page the central character is emotionally stirred by the light that "bilges around him."

John Simon, in the Summer issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW, spoke of "our new breed of illiterate playwrights." Is there beginning to be a demand for illiterate novelists too?

Generally speaking, however, there seems to be a floor under our serious publishers, a minimum standard of technical competence below which (as a rule) they don't sink. In this they are like our commercial moviemakers, whose corniest productions (the Elvis Presley drag-racing things, for example) have a certain professional know-how that amateur productions lack. The cameraman, just an ordinary hack pro doing a job, knows how to adjust the focal length and the shutter speed; he is not lazy or careless or indifferent or drunk, and the camera doesn't lurch, wobble or shake unless he wants it to; the man on lights isn't so busy picking his nose that he forgets to switch one on, he isn't colorblind, and if a bulb burns out he knows how to replace it; the chorus girls aren't knock-kneed or round-shouldered, and they go through their routine routines kicking in unison and singing in tune; Elvis's voice doesn't crack or wander away, he doesn't merely paw the guitar, and though his name isn't José Limon, he does step and wiggle in time to the beat. Elvis is a pro. He works steady and gets good pay. He makes six movies a year at $500,000 each. He doesn't command that kind of money for nothing. He is a sound commercial property because he does with professional skill something that many people gladly pay to see; and those of us who don't in any sense of the term see it, who would find the whole performance boring because we want all kinds of things it hasn't got and don't care for what it has got, go our own way and don't distress ourselves unduly. Such movies are not offered to us as works of art. We are not deceived or disappointed.

But commercial publishers of fiction often deceive and disappoint us. Whereas most movies, including some that are pretty good, are offered only as harmless pastimes, many novels that are no better and some that are much worse—some whose corn quotient is as high as Elvis's—are offered as works of art. The standard items of literary commerce, the books of the week, the month and the year, are often

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represented by their publishers as masterpieces of literature and serious contributions to contemporary thought, and are earnestly discussed as such by reviewers and readers. The slow but unmistakable revolution of falling expectations that has accompanied the rise of courses in classroom management and PTA relations is seldom explicitly acknowledged in the book business. The tradition of a tradition of literary culture emptily persists, and under-educated writers write for under-educated readers in the sincere belief that they are producing works of art for lovers of art. The readers think so too. How else are we to explain the high esteem in which the sloppy prose of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud is held? How else are we to account for the fact that J. R. R. Tolkien is called a stylist and Aldous Huxley a thinker? How else are we to understand the phenomenon of Lawrence Durrell's reputation? How else are we to understand James Baldwin's reputation as a novelist?[2]

For writing good fiction takes as special a talent as writing good poetry; if we haven't got it, no degree of intellectual clarity and acuity will make up for it. James Baldwin is one of a number of writers—such as Mary McCarthy, Edmund Wilson, C. P. Snow, George Orwell and John Hersey—who write excellent expository prose but fall to pieces when they write fiction. *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* is a long fictionized popularization of the title essay in *Notes of a Native Son*; the novel is as cheap as the essay is brilliant, and there is nothing in it to match the quality of any of the other essays. Though much of the action takes place in Harlem, the feel of Harlem comes through with less definition than in "The Harlem Ghetto," and though there are long discussions of the dilemmas of Negro artists and intellectuals there is none so fresh, clear and enlightening as "Stranger in the Village" or another essay, which I can't locate at the moment, recounting the debates at a Paris conference on *Négritude*.

The novel recounts the life of a Negro born in a Harlem rat-slum, who wants to be an actor but doesn't want to play the traditional roles that keep Negroes in their traditional place below the bottom of white society on stage as well as off. It is a hard, ugly, insulting life; to show a man who is forced to live outside the limits of most white people's human consideration achieving human dignity inward and outward, and professional success inward and outward, is extremely difficult: both because the story itself, given our society, is hard to make plausible, and because the central character would have to be heroic. It hardly needs saying that we are skeptical about heroes now and that serious writers—including Baldwin—no longer ask us to suspend our skepticism; and it hardly needs saying that the inherent implausibility of the story is almost as absolute as that of the Tarzan stories. Don't tell me about Charles Gilpin, Gordon Heath and Sidney

[2] TELL ME HOW LONG THE TRAIN'S BEEN GONE, by *James Baldwin*. Dial Press. $5.95.

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Poitier. In order to be a great actor, a man must have good plays: Eugene O'Neill's father discovered that no man can be a great actor in *The Count of Monte Cristo,* and what chance does any actor of whatever color have with the crude melodramas and Sambo's Irish Rose things to which these men have been limited? So that Baldwin has undertaken an impossible enterprise.

A character can be sympathetic without being heroic, as in the case of Gimpel the Fool, or even decent, as in the case of Humbert Humbert; but he cannot be sympathetic if he is made of papier maché. Though Humbert Humbert is guilty of kidnapping, statutory rape, murder, and driving on the wrong side of the road, we like him; but though Baldwin's Leo Proudhammer is a fighter against injustices I have protested against all my life, I don't like him. I don't dislike him either. I just don't react to him at all. He doesn't engage my feelings. This is a literary failure. It may be due largely to the fact that we see him first in a ridiculous melodramatic situation: as an actor suffering a heart attack on stage, forcing himself to keep going, reciting the lines and performing the prescribed business automatically, and collapsing just after the curtain falls on this exchange: "So you've come home to stay"? "I think, dear lady—but I do not wish to grieve you—that I may have come home to die." "The line seemed terribly funny to me at that moment," says Proudhammer. To me too; and not only the line, but the whole situation. Its corny unreality immediately establishes Proudhammer as an unreal character whom it would be silly to take seriously, and fills us with doubts about Baldwin's own seriousness. In the age of the put-on, we may hesitate to be put off by kitsch lest it turn out to be a spoof of kitsch. This seems to me a mistake, for two reasons: (1) kitsch is not worth spoofing unless the spoofer's name is S. J. Perelman, and (2) what seems to be a spoof may turn out to be the real thing. There is no reason to believe, for example, that the cliché style of Malamud's *A New Life* is put on, because Malamud has never written in any other style; and there is no reason to believe that *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* is not just as seriously intended. But Baldwin, like Malamud, is so much concerned with the message that he neglects the medium. (Intending no respect for the admen's guru.)

Not that Baldwin lacks talent for the medium. While recovering, Proudhammer recalls his life; and the recollections of his childhood are for the most part very well rendered. I can feel the cold and smell the damp dilapidation of his parents' apartment. There are even flashes of life in his adolescence and manhood—in the account of his working in a West Indian restaurant in Greenwich Village, for example, and the account of his quarrel with his tamed brother Caleb. But these are exceptions. Sometimes Baldwin is so intent on getting the message across that he trips up on elementary matters of fact. We all know that the police are criminally careless in the matter of establishing evidence,

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and that for their purposes one nigger is as good as another; in my native South Carolina, I knew a Negro who was sentenced to five years on the chain gang for "loitering in a suspicious manner," and there is no reason to believe that a person who chooses to be a policeman is any finer in New York than in South Carolina. So that it is quite credible that the innocent Caleb should be convicted of robbing a store; and the white-trash style of the police who arrested him is a style I have personally observed. As long as we entrust the enforcement of our laws to white trash, they will be enforced with a canny superstitious regard for race. In the South, with the exception of a few liberals, we want them to be enforced that way; in the North, with the exception of the likes of William Buckley, Jr., we don't. But in any case, robbery is a local crime, not a federal crime, and those who are convicted of it are put in local jails, not in federal penitentiaries. Having been convicted of robbing a store in Harlem, Caleb, a resident of Harlem, would not be sent to a Southern prison farm. Neither would Leo's friend Christopher, another Harlem resident, be sent to a Southern reform school. This kind of carelessness is very bad for the verisimilitude; and so are some of the symposia on race relations that we are asked to take as realistic informal conversation. Perhaps no man fighting for justice as James Baldwin does should be expected to write with the meticulousness of a James Joyce; but bad writing in the cause of justice is still bad writing. The publication, reading and influence of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* are social facts of considerable interest; but it has no literary interest.

Exactly the same thing can be said of *1984*, of *Darkness at Noon*, and of many other books, including three of those before me.[3] Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog*, a satire about a dog who through a series of gland and organ transplants was transformed into "a short, ill-knit human male" and became a highly successful Soviet official, is about as subtle as a firecracker under a coffee can. The fact that it was wrtiten in 1925 and has never been published in the USSR is of no literary interest. Compared to Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog"—but let's not insult Kafka's memory by making such a comparison.

Nodar Dumbadze's *The Sunny Night*, a story of student life in Tiflis from the eve of World War II to the death of Stalin, is the nearest thing to *Ladies'-Home-Journal* fluff-headed romanticism I've ever seen from the USSR. The war is hardly mentioned. There is a lot of harmless adolescent horsing around and a bit of tender twilit love between wholesome kids—in my foolish youth I played the musical saw, and when I read those tender scenes I could hear once again its throbbing strains; the innocence of Dumbadze's whole per-

[3] THE HEART OF A DOG, by *Mikhail Bulgakov*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95. THE SUNNY NIGHT, by *Nodar Dumbadze*. Washington Square Press. $5.95. A PERSONAL MATTER, by *Kenzaburo Oë*. Grove Press. $5.00.

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formance is summed up in this representative speech at a Communist meeting—a reply to a speaker who objected to short skirts, makeup, rings and earrings:

> "Comrade Guiorgui, who gave you the right to come here and besmirch the name of our vigorous youth! Youth will come into its own and inherit this world and so it has happened with every past generation. . . . Our youth is indeed our hope. Let our youth wear narrow and short skirts, as they please. Only let them read books, let them love the nation, their native country, the world. Let the girls wear earrings and finger rings, only let them be good mothers and believe in goodness and honesty as people used to believe in God. Let Baramidze fight, but let him fight only for what is noble."

The Christian Endeavor Society and the Young Communist League appeal to the same types. All establishments encourage fatuity, and the faithful workhorses of the Soviet establishment produce as much horseshit as our own.

In this respect young horses are as productive as old ones, and to distinguish between one breed of horse and another is the merest pedantry. The followers of every new idea or tendency develop a set of clichés having to do with it: obligatory or ritual words, phrases, tones of voice, gestures, acts: so that the most accomplished virtuosi of ritual become the leaders of cults. The lead horses, that is. In Japan, I gather, the current parade celebrates the tension between the tradition of family solidarity and the post-war emancipation of the individual; and its lead horse, I gather, is Kenzaburo Oë. *A Personal Matter* is his first work to appear in English. The translator's prefatory note, dated March, 1968, says:

> Last year, to mark his first decade as a writer, Oë's collected works were published—two volumes of essays, primarily political (Oë is an uncompromising spokesman for the New Left of Japan), dozens of short stories, and eight novels. . . . Oë's industry is dazzling. But even more remarkable is his popularity, which has continued to climb: to date, the *Complete Works,* in six volumes, has sold nine hundred thousand copies. The key to Oë's popularity is his sensitivity to the very special predicament of the postwar generation; he is as important as he is because he has provided that generation with a hero of its own.

So that *A Personal Matter* can be taken as a statement by an accredited spokesman of the Now generation in Japan, though personally I don't trust anybody over thirteen. The central character, whose friends call him Bird because of his boniness and beakiness, has drunk himself out of graduate school at the National University and is now

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teaching English at a commercial cram school. He has been saving small sums of money for a trip to Africa; but as the novel opens he is afraid he'll have to postpone the trip indefinitely because his wife is having a baby. As if that weren't enough to discourage a man, the baby looks as if he has two heads. No, the doctors assure Bird, not two heads, but a brain hernia: the bones of the skull didn't close properly, and part of the brain grew outside. Surgery is indicated, as soon as the baby is strong enough to sustain it; and the prognosis is that if the baby lives he will probably be just a lump of protoplasm. In response to some strong hints from Bird, the director of the hospital angrily says that they can hardly be expected to kill the baby or let him die of neglect; then he says that it is perfectly orthodox to change the formula in the nursing bottle, it's done all the time, they'll gradually replace the milk with sugar-water, and if Bird will leave his phone number they'll call him as soon as anything decisive develops. He gives them the phone number of a former girl friend, and while awaiting the call in her apartment has more fun in bed than he has ever had with anybody, anywhere, any time. Like wow, man! But what with apprehension, guilt, impatience, the thrust of a *Zeitgeist* and a *Weltansicht* in which confrontation capability has replaced dialogue, and some real deep existentialist philosophy from a Lesbian radio producer who drops in, he starts hitting the bottle again, shows up for his 10 a.m. class with a hellish hangover, vomits all over the floor in the middle of a recitation, and loses his job as of the end of the term. Next day the phone rings, he is summoned to the hospital, and the girl friend drives him in her red unmuffled MG; the baby has weakened but not died, the surgeons would like to proceed with brain surgery before it is too late, and will the father just sign the form right here. No, he will not. He takes the baby out to the red MG in a swirling sweeping rain, and the girl friend drives to a private clinic whose founder does a thriving business in disposing of unwanted babies in medically plausible ways. In this case it will be easy, because the baby has developed pneumonia while they were driving around in circles looking for the clinic. Then they go to a gay bar to have a drink.

The fairy proprietor gives out with like some real deep philosophy that, you know, like reinforces the Lesbian radio producer's. So Bird quick grabs a taxi to the clinic and rescues the baby just in time. He doesn't want to be a person who is always running away. See? The girl friend doesn't see. She is terribly upset. After all, Bird had promised to take her to Africa with her money.

The next scene takes place in the hospital. Bird, his wife, her parents and the baby are saying goodbye to the doctors and nurses. The operation has been a complete success: what had seemed to be a brain hernia was something much less rare, a benign tumor. The baby will be a normal human being, though he will probably have a low I.Q.

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Bird, full of a new sense of dignity and responsibility, will not go back into teaching; instead, since he speaks English fluently, he will work as a guide so he can get big tips from American tourists and provide for his son through life. The girl friend takes the African road maps Bird had bought while waiting for the baby to be born and goes to Africa with another boy friend.

The sudden surprise happy ending is one of the oldest ways of cheating: the author finally refuses to face the implictaions of the dilemma he has posited, and assumes that the reader is too childish to notice the evasion or not to be pleased. The flower-child mentality, the belief that a Hobbit or Tinker Bell or Pooh Bear will of course come to the rescue, seems to be flummoxing the New Left in Japan as well as here. Its refusal to have a program seems to be due as much to Peter Pan-ism as to the tendency of politics to imitate art: in this case, formlessness. Everybody seems to have forgotten what Lenin knew: that if a revolution is to succeed it must not wreck the railroad station but run the trains. And not slam them into each other, either. Am I confusing activists with hippies? Hardly more than they confuse themselves.

Two much more intelligent approaches to the problems of fairly decent people in a world run by admirers of John Wayne are Nat Hentoff's *Onwards!* and Marvin Cohen's *The Self-Devoted Friend.*[4] *Onwards!* is a short novel (141 pages) consisting of XXXIV short dialogues about the war, civil rights, black nationalism, violent and nonviolent protest, academic freedom, participatory democracy, literary sensibility, alienation, thrust, confrontation, dialogue, dichotomy, ambiguity, the human condition, etc., all very funny, all clear, clean and sharp. The characters are alive, the language is alive, the sequence of episodes is alive. It's like gin-and-tonic on a hot afternoon.

The Self-Devoted Friend, 160 pages of short dialogues and musings on such things as birth, death, love, sex, art, religion, work, psychoanalysis, etc., is much less successful; most of it is rather heavy, especially when it strains to be light. But there are flashes throughout, flashes, flashes. This is Cohen's first book; I think he will give us better ones.

That fine old humorous humanist Nabokov has republished one of his earliest novels, the second, translated from the Russian by his son Dmitri and himself.[5] *King, Queen, Knave* is to Nabokov as *The Mudfog Papers* is to Dickens: an indication of better things to come. In a foreword he says it is the gayest of all his novels. It isn't. *Pnin* is gayer, *Lolita* is gayer, *Pale Fire* is gayer. In the English-reading world, at least, Nabokov will be remembered for these and for the incomparable *Speak, Memory.* Students of his work will therefore read *King, Queen, Knave,* as students of Dickens read *The Mudfog Papers;* but I doubt that it will long be read for its own sake. We read Nabokov for his

[4] ONWARDS! by *Nat Hentoff.* Simon & Schuster. $3.95. THE SELF-DEVOTED FRIEND, by *Marvin Cohen.* New Directions. $5.00.

[5] KING, QUEEN, KNAVE, by *Vladimir Nabokov.* McGraw-Hill. $5.95.

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marvelous shining language and his allusive puzzles; but here the language seldom shines and the puzzles are not very subtle. There are even verbal infelicities here and there: "the vacational influx," "as if he was," and "unfrequency," "unfrequently" and "undistinguishable" for "infrequency," "infrequently" and "indistinguishable."

The story tells how a vulgar stupid woman who has married for money plots with her oafish boy friend to kill her clever, pleasant, urbane and gentle husband so that part-time adultery can be converted into full-time lecherous marriage, and how certain chance events incident to the husband's business make the woman the victim of her own plot. There are a number of charming little touches. Nabokov and his wife, unnamed but unmistakable, appear among the supernumeraries at a resort hotel: the vulgar woman wonders whether the language they are speaking is Polish or Esthonian or something, and seeing "some kind of net" leaning against the wall near them, "a bag of pale-bluish gauze on a ring fixed to a rod of light metal," decides that they are "shrimp catchers" (p. 232). Two other supernumeraries, playing chess, are called simply Black and White (p. 241); but later the vulgar woman dances with one Weiss (p. 252), and next morning Weiss walks along the beach with one Schwarz (p. 260). Nabokov's chess game is much better now; but there are intimations of genius here, as in the deftly telling use of the word "auricular" in this description of a floorwalker in a Berlin department store: "Piffke was burly, dignified, and smartly dressed. He had blond eyelashes, baby-colored skin, a profile that had prudently stopped halfway between man and teapot, and a second-rate diamond on his plump auricular" (p. 77). The vulgar woman says Piffke lives modestly in "a tiny apartment full of boxes and things" (p. 135). Later, her husband, his employer, says to him with what seems to be shocking and altogether uncharacteristic cruelty, "Regards to your cockroaches" (p. 169). Only some 64 pages later, after explaining to his wife that the Nabokovs' net is not for shrimp but for butterflies, does he reveal what lay behind that remark:

> "Who wants to catch butterflies?" remarked Martha.
>
> "Oh, it must be good sport," said Dreyer. "In fact, I think to have a passion for something is the greatest happiness on earth."
>
> "Finish your chocolate," said Martha.
>
> "Yes," said Dreyer. "I think it's fascinating, the secrets you find in most ordinary people. That reminds me: Piffke—yes, yes, fat pink Piffke—collects beetles and is a famous expert on them."
>
> "Let's go," said Martha. "Those arrogant foreigners are staring at you."

This too is genial writing: every line reveals character. And if you are wondering why a civilized man like Dreyer married a white-trash type like Martha, the answer is either quite simple or inextricably

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complex, depending on how you take it at the moment: love. That's Nabokov—even though not yet the Nabokov who makes us stand up and walk the floor with delight while reading.

By comparison, novels that merely fulfill the basic requirements are not very interesting.[6] Abraham Rothberg's *The Song of David Freed* is a perfect example of the good old-fashioned novel that has nothing wrong with it—but would you marry a person merely because there was nothing wrong with him/her? David Freed is a New York Jewish boy with a devout heart, a strong character and a golden voice, who becomes an extraordinarily moving boy cantor and has every reason to believe that he can become a great adult cantor; but since events in his family, in the neighborhood and in the synagogue destroy his belief in God, he deliberately ruins his voice and determines to make a new life without it. The title is doubtless ambiguous. I believe every word of the story, but as a person who cares about the art of fiction I find nothing here to make me walk the floor.

Anton Donchev's *Time of Parting* belongs to the Soviet school of historical romance. It has a cast of thousands, many of whom are horses. It's about as good as anything by Kenneth Roberts or Edna Ferber, and comes with an official certificate of harmlessness: the Dimitrov Prize, awarded by the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Try to imagine the Legislature of New Jersey awarding a literary prize, and you'll have a pretty good idea of the quality of this novel and also perceive the true meaning of the Spirit of Glassboro. The prize carries with it the title of Laureate.

The late Blaise Cendrars was what is known as a flamboyant personality: corporal in the Foreign Legion, jewel salesman in the Far and Middle East, raconteur at the Deux Magots, war correspondent, film producer, spiv, and writer of prose like that of Gene Fowler, Negley Farson and the ghost of Minnesota Fats: the kind of writer Henry Miller considers great. His first novel to be translated into English, *To the End of the World,* is a sad example of the picayune picaresque. It's all about this eighty-year-old Paris actress who picks up a Foreign Legionnaire on leave and pays him to bed her, then tells her friends, "He's great! He made me come!" and goes on to the supreme triumph of her professional career: walking out on the stage in reeking rags, suddenly stripping them off, standing there stark naked in her bones, and reciting Villon's *"Ballade de la Belle Heaulmière."* After that everybody drinks champagne out of her slippers, and we are introduced to the fascinating world of intrigue behind the footlights, with all kinds of sideshow freaks and entrepreneurs and murderers. After

[6] THE SONG OF DAVID FREED, by *Abraham Rothberg.* G. P. Putnam. $4.95. TIME OF PARTING, by *Anton Donchev.* William Morrow. $5.95. TO THE END OF THE WORLD, by *Blaise Cendrars.* Grove Press. $5.00. A QUIET PLACE TO WORK, by *Harry Brown.* Alfred A. Knopf. $6.95. MELINDA, by *Gaia Servadio.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $6.95. THE PASSIONS OF UXPORT, by *Maxine Kumin.* Harper & Row $6.95.

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her funeral the Foreign Legion celebrates, by her request and with her money: "It is impossible to go into the details of that mad night. Everyone was drunk. Champagne corks flew out of their own accord, the celebrants showered each other with foam. The most disgusting songs were sung and taken up in chorus. Some undressed to show their tattoos." This thing has been called a celebration of human vitality.

Harry Brown handles the swashbuckling style much better. *A Quiet Place to Work* starts out full of promise, and from time to time pays something on the note with a brilliant passage, but finally degenerates into a murder mystery complete with a hero who himself commits murder, handing himself the all-too-familiar phony justification that if the state can't or won't punish murder the individual must. That's one way to save the state embarrassment, of course. The book is full of good lines, however: "On any given occasion I prefer the company of a familiar devil to that of an unknown saint," and "Yet, for all that, into each love a little brain must fall." And here's a passage on some —*some,* that is—of our contemporary poets:

> But then, I remembered, as the fifteen years that followed 1950 disappeared slipshod into the past, poetry was taken over by a jump of clowns who looked like used condoms and smelled like Times Square on a Saturday night. They were loud and they were manic; and as soon as they'd enticed the Muse up to their communal pad they'd stripped her, painted some dirty words on her belly, slugged her a few times, lathered against her in a gang shag, and finally booted her out half-dressed, bawling, rubbed raw, and full of as pretty a dose of clap as ever left San Francisco.

That's the general style. There's a lot of such fun. Even so, a Hollywood writer who goes to a quiet Mexican village to write a novel but can't make the Muse come until there have been five deaths—one from age, one by suicide, one by accident-or-suicide, and two by murder—doesn't get much sympathy from me. And neither does the kinky Muse of Detection.

But not all naughty novels have the jukebox tone. Some are cooler. One of the amusements of my adolescence was going to hear a fundamentalist preacher who roared the curse of God against "bobbed hair and bobbed skirts" and what he called "cosmottics," and who referred to divorce and remarriage as "progressive adultery." Gaia Servadio's *Melinda* is an amusing show-biz-type novel about a girl who at age thirteen started seducing every male in sight, including her father and her brother, and went on to a glorious career of progressive and simultaneous adultery, and incidentally a career as a best-selling novelist. And Maxine Kumin's *The Passions of Uxport* is considerably above average in the large category of upper-middle-class-suburban-soap-opera novels. Neither has any literary interest, but they have a certain

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sociological interest as popular entertainments for people who can read literate prose easily enough to enjoy it.

Happily, we can end this review on a more positive note: for there are two excellent volumes of short stories.[7]

George P. Elliott's *An Hour of Last Things* comprises stories of small-town or rural childhood, stories of adult big-city life, and stories for which I suppose the most nearly appropriate term is science fiction. I like the stories of childhood best. "The Well and the Bulldozers," for example, which tells how he helped his father dig and blast a fine deep well down through earth and rock, and how both the well and the farm were obliterated by bulldozers excavating for a giant reservoir, presents in simple concrete terms all the implications of obliterating a way of life, a way of feeling, a way of being. And "Miracle Play" tells of the pleasant puzzlement of a little boy who goes to see and hear his father and his birthmarked virgin aunt in a Nativity play in the village church and who somehow relates it to the mysterious birth of a baby brother. The adult stories are epiphanies: sudden revelations of the meaning of previously opaque experience: a ship's radio man gives up an easy and fiercely pleasurable erotic relationship in favor of a more difficult one involving love; a young widow with plenty of money resigns her job in order to enjoy a civilized leisure, then takes another in order not to yield to a newly discovered homosexual tendency; a taxi driver resigns his job in order to escape the murderous complications caused by an attractive and friendly girl dispatcher who enjoys holding hands with men but freezes up when they try to go beyond hand-holding: she seems to be an involuntary *belle dame sans merci,* a siren of the two-way radio. The science-fiction stories bore me. Though the space engineers have made Michel Butor's 1953 essay *"La crise de croissance de la science-fiction"* out of date in certain details, its main thesis holds up quite well these fifteen years later: the genre requires not imagination but lack of imagination. I might easily make up a story about trees that walk and talk, for example, but they would either have to do human things or behave in ways that have no human significance or become involved in monster-movie situations with human beings. Or painfully obvious didactic situations, as in Elliott's "Invasion of the Planet of Love," where militarists from Earth flee Venus lest they begin to melt with love like the Venerians. The mere fact of flying irresponsibly away from the known tends to make everything too cheap and easy: not only the imagined situations but even the syntax. Elliott's very prose suffers when he takes off into space or future time or hitherto unknown states of being. It becomes not imaginative but simply unreal. This is a universal disability of science-fiction writers. Even the allegedly "good" practitioners of a genre

[7] AN HOUR OF LAST THINGS AND OTHER STORIES, by *George P. Elliott.* Harper & Row. $5.95. THE PASHA'S CONCUBINE AND OTHER TALES, by *Ivo Andrić.* Alfred A. Knopf. $6.95.

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conceived in sin and born to paltriness—Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov, for example—write like kids with ray guns from Woolworth's, or Pentagon intellectuals. It's depressing that so many people go for those rocket-powered horse operas. Elliott never sinks that low or even into that order of lowness, but his science-fiction stories are certainly of lower quality than his others. "Into the Cone of Cold" deals with the personality changes in one Stuart, a non-Catholic poet teaching English at a Catholic college, who submits to an experiment in which his temperature is suddenly reduced to absolute zero and kept there for twelve hours. He comes out of the apparatus much more aggressive than he went in—like General Bullmoose, my wife says—and a few days later, in an argument, flatly accuses the president of the college, Brother Joseph, of using him and lying to him.

> Brother Joseph swirled his glass, watched the ice drift, and said, "If that's the way you feel about it."
>
> To this soap-opera line any response Stuart could think of would be just another soap-opera line. He left without speaking.

Exactly so. Just as it is impossible to be a great actor in *The Count of Monte Cristo,* so it is impossible to write well in science fiction. Let us take it as an amiable weakness of an excellent writer that he keeps trying.

Censorship is not to blame for bad writing. The Russians have Mikhail Sholokhov, but we had Zane Grey, who was just as bad. Neither does censorship necessarily prevent the appearance of good writers: under the Czarist censorship, which I gather was pretty God-damned stupid, Russia produced Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, Gogol, Andreyev, etc.; and under Soviet-type censorship and whatever preceded it, the country now known as Yugoslavia has produced Ivo Andrić (1892-), a genius comparable to—well, he is really incomparable. Like Thomas Aquinas' angels, each genius is the only member of his own species. *The Pasha's Concubine and Other Tales* is a magnificent collection of sad but magnificent tales of life in what is now called Yugoslavia, from about the beginning of our century through the Nazi occupation. They are beautifully translated by Joseph Hitrec, who is himself a fine writer. The first paragraph of the first story, "The Bridge on the Zepa," is inviting and not misleading:

> In the fourth year of his term as Grand Vizier, Yusuf committed a political indiscretion and, falling victim to a dangerous intrigue, unexpectedly fell into disfavor. The struggle lasted a whole winter and spring. It was a wicked and cold spring, which refused to let the summer begin. But in May, Yusuf emerged from banishment as victor. And so life went on as before, glorious, peaceful, and undisturbed. But from those winter months, when the margin be-

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tween life and death, glory and ruin, amounted to little more than the sharp edge of a knife, there remained in the victorious Vizier a sense of something fretful and subdued. It was something that could not be expressed, something that men of experience who have suffered harbor inside them like a hidden treasure, and which unconsciously, and only at times, is reflected in a look, a movement, or in speech.

There are 302 pages of such magnificence.

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JOHN SIMON

Mailer on the March

NINE CENTURIES LATER, almost to the year, the Norman Conquest strikes again. First there was Norman O. Brown; then Norman Podhoretz with his *Making It*, disliked but extensively discussed; now it is Norman Mailer with *The Armies of the Night*,[1] wildly and unanimously acclaimed. Is there yet another Norman waiting in the wings: Krasna or Corwin or Rosten?

Making It was misunderstood by those who took it seriously. It is clearly intended as an outline for a future Broadway prestige musical: music by Bernstein, lyrics by Sondheim, book by Arthur Laurents. Entitled *Norman!* and staged and choreographed by Jerome Robbins, it will establish Podhoretz as a serious talent provided a suitable star can be found (Robert Morse, Buddy Hackett, or, if he can be coaxed into assuming so fat a lead, Mickey Rooney), and provided a large enough audience can appreciate the humors of "The Trilling Tango," the hilarious trio, "Leavis, Lawrence, and Me," and the spectacular nightmare ballet, "Your Negro Problem and Mine." It will also be Podhoretz's revenge: he once presumed to butt in on a conversation between Lauren Bacall and Arlene Francis and was abusively reprimanded by Miss Bacall—an incident which, like anything else of interest, is not included in the book. Now she may end up playing his sympathetic schoolmarm.

The Armies of the Night is a different sort of book, or books—for it is in two almost antithetical parts, as the subtitle indicates: "History as a Novel, The Novel as History." The first part, some 215 pages, is the narrative of Mailer's participation in the October 1967 anti-Vietnam war March on the Pentagon; the second part, about 70 pages, is a history of the entire March as pieced together from various sources. The subtitle is emblematic: if Truman Capote can invent "the nonfiction novel," Mailer can go him one better and invent two new genres. All three, however, are merely variations on a very ancient genre: megalomania. "History as a Novel" is almost unrelieved self-promotion, often in atrocious prose, tiresome but shot through with glimmers of brilliance. "The Novel as History" is, except for a few characteristic lapses, controlled, imaginative, compassionate and even masterly. Mailer continues to be Janus-faced: novelist *manqué* masquerading as *enfant terrible* to one side; journalist extraordinary and vigorous essayist to the other.

"History as a Novel," then (and one reflects that people who can write novels as novels don't need to write them as history, or vice

[1] THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT, by *Norman Mailer*. New American Library. $5.95.

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versa) is a leisurely, self-indulgent account of Mailer before, during, and after the March. We get all sorts of information about his daily life and attitudes, e.g., that he hates the telephone and is a "Left Conservative," which means "that he tried to think in the style of Marx in order to attain certain values suggested by Edmund Burke." Then comes the weekend in Washington: a party at which he gets drunk, followed by an evening of fund-raising speeches at the Ambassador Theatre, where Mailer, bourbon-befogged, makes an ass of himself. There are vignettes of fellow-speakers and demonstrators: Robert Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, Paul Goodman, and, at next day's draft card turning-in, of Chaplain Coffin—one of the few absolutely sympathetic portraits (usually jealousy gets the better of Mailer). Speeches and more speeches, the March itself as Mailer saw it, his arrest, a night in jail, complications around his release, a semitriumphal return to New York.

Writing about the book in *The Observer,* Kenneth Tynan pegged Mailer as "an officially approved (because politically ineffective) mutineer . . . Referring to himself in the jocular security of the third person, Mailer has described these events in . . . a masterpiece of guarded narcissism. While thousands die in Vietnam, we are invited to study the private agony of Mailer, faced with the threat of a five-day sentence . . ." There is truth in that charge.

The book, in a sense, is the gradual establishing of Mailer's greatness—if not, indeed, his divinity. Let us follow the main stages of the apotheosis of that Mailer who, like a true divinity, is often identified by his capitalized attributes: the Historian, the Novelist, the Existentialist, the Participant, the Ruminant (based, perhaps, on Jove's propensity for appearing in bovine form). Mailer, we learn, can be any age at will (p. 9), is an accomplished actor (10), will tolerate only very good parties (14), feels that "Proust had lost a cell mate the day they were born in different bags. (Bag is of course used here to specify milieu and not the exceptional character of the mothers, Mme. Proust and Mrs. I. B. Mailer.)" That parenthesis, by the way, is a fair sample of the wit in the book (17). On certain days he feels he is the best writer in America (22), and a copy of his last book is now "noted" because holding it made him miss the urinal at the Ambassador and pee on the floor (29).

He has visions of himself portraying Huey Long on the stage, and is disappointed that his speech at the Ambassador, which developed his peeing on the floor into a politico-metaphysical allegory, did not get a standing ovation (51). He speaks, utterly seriously, of "his legend" (58), and feels slighted when at a gathering of 200 people no one congratulates him on his work or asks him to make a speech (63). He envisions the March as something that could land him in jail for quite a few years (78), and muses about his long-time hopes "that before he was done, he would lead an army" (90). He ranks himself as

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"best novelist" of the country and appends two ironic question marks —a bit of modesty that isn't meant to fool anybody, he assumes (97). He is too vain to wear glasses on a march crawling with cameras (106) and is again angered at not being asked to address the crowd ("the novelist and orator," Tynan calls him). He is "in love with himself" for being less scared than he expected to be (113) and believes that Lowell and Macdonald went as far as they did at his urging (118). His new film (I saw it, and it is a stinker) is perhaps the best movie about the police made in America (135), and his four marriages are "a lonely odyssey into the land of witches" (123)—with four wives and six children around, how can an odyssey be lonely?

Mailer is constantly amazed that the military and officialdom act as if they had not heard of Norman Mailer (140), for it is of course inconceivable that his name be really unknown to anyone. He is frequently worried, before he acts or speaks, about how his words and deeds will be misreported by the press (141 and *passim*). He is now fascinated by the Germans because they like his books more than Americans do (143). He has become accustomed to living with his image (162)—even in the sarcophagus of his image (5)—so that when, in jail, he is thirsty and takes a drink, we are treated to this hagiographic periphrasis:

> . . . On these thoughts, he took a drink of water. It was characteristic of him to make such a move, and he hardly knew if he did it for the best or worst reasons, did it because in recognizing the value of thirst he had a small panic to destroy the temptation to search such a moral adventure further, or did he do it precisely because he was now aware of the value of thirst, and so thirst by such consciousness had lost its value since the ability to suffer drought was, by this logic, valuable only if water were not available. Or did he take a drink because he wished to study his new state after satisfying thirst? He noticed only that he was a trifle sad on the first sip, and couldn't stop going to the sink for more and more . . . between the saint and the debauchee, no middle ground seemed tenable for his appetites. (163)

Finally, Mailer's delusions of grandeur make him think the police capable of "concocting [for him] a nasty accident in a corridor, a piece of petty Oswalderie" (207). This is only just, for "with the possible exception of John F. Kennedy, there had not been a President of the United States . . . whom Mailer secretly considered more suitable than himself" (119). And the climax: upon his release, Mailer addresses the press and newsreels with a speech full of divine love (213-14) that begins, "Today is Sunday, and while I am not a Christian, I happen to be married to one. And there are times when I think the loveliest thing about my dear wife is her unspoken love for

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Jesus Christ." Just plain mother love—for if Mailer is God, that makes Beverly Bentley Mailer the Virgin Mary. But, alas, one recoils at so much theophany; as Pascal wrote to Mlle. de Roannez, "*Si Dieu se découvrait continuellement aux hommes, il n'y aurait point de mérite à le croire.*"

But Mailer has found the way to make megalomania pay off doubly. He has invested his book (like Podhoretz) with an air of the confessional, and gets points for his honesty. Then, with a joke or two, a qualifying epithet or three, he undercuts his flights of self-deification, and so (unlike Podhoretz) gets further points for grace, wit, and a charming modesty at the core of his megalomania. In fact, the establishment and his audience have driven Mailer into becoming a clown-hero-scapegoat for their vicarious satisfaction, with results that redound to no one's glory.

The writing itself is questionable, starting with grammatical errors, redundancies, misused words galore (list supplied on request), through such a pathetic attempt at erudition as "Et tu Bruté [*sic*]!" from which at least a copy editor should have saved Mailer, all the way to just plain poor style. Never mind mere flatfooted elegancies such as "combative rent" for wound, or wretched images such as "the bourbon was as luminous as moonshine to the spores of insanity in the flesh of his brain." There are whole long passages that belong in wax museums; for example, the one about "public speaking being . . . a sullen expression of human possibility metaphorically equal to a bugger on his victim, etc." or the one about motorcycle orgies, or the one about the American small town, or the one about being admitted to the roped-off dignitaries' section at the Washington Monument (a place of privilege for which Mailer thinks the word is "sinecure"!) —here the metaphor goes hogwild: the "sense of long-gone armies, that fine strain of love . . . hovers like some last lavender in the dying echo of a superbly played string." And so on, superbly.

On the other hand, there are also some felicitous images, as well as good descriptive passages—such as the one detailing the outlandish costumes of the marchers (where the rhythm is itself a metaphor), or the numerous evocations of fellow-demonstrators (though with Paul Goodman, rivalry, and with Lowell hero-worship of his success and snobbish adulation of his New England ancestry muddy the portraiture). Again, Mailer's evaluation of the Vietnam situation seems to me extremely sensible, and is set forth in lively forensic prose without floods of rhetoric—until, at the end, we get one of the typical metaphysic-mongering tirades, in this case about Christ versus the Computer. Mailer's manias, hang-ups, *mishigas,* though not rampant, pop up too often in the first part of the book: rant against medicine, psychiatry, LSD, liberals, the "cancer" of society, witches and other demons—and, inevitably, that ludicrous passion for "existential" a modifier that Mailer plasters all over the place, like post-ups of Bogey in a mod pad.

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But when he gets around to "The Novel as History," it proves more than a collation or digest of documents and accounts. He augments available facts about the planning and execution of the March with a sympathetic, supportive imagination that visualizes, vitalizes and lovingly marshals all this material, and if he makes up some pungent but imaginary dialogues, well, so did Thucydides. (In the first part of the book, Mailer's untruthfulness hurts—as when he turns a party given by a dentist into one given by a liberal academic, in order to indulge his spleen against academics and liberals.) Except for the brief coda, where Mailer again goes skyrocketing into nonsense metaphysics, this is a marvelous piece of historical journalism or journalistic history, and fully justifies Lowell's remark to Mailer, quoted in the book, "Elizabeth [Hardwick] and I really think you're the finest journalist in America."

The problem is this: fiction and autobiography are inseparable for Mailer, and autobiography is a demented Waring blender churning away at sexual, political, and literary power fantasies, sadomasochistic day-dreams. But get Mailer away from himself—and that means also from fiction—and he becomes a writer of parts. A society ought to be formed to protect Mailer from himself. In this case, journalism's gain would not be fiction's loss.

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ROGER SALE

Seizing the Yesterday[1]

PARTS OF V. S. PRITCHETT'S *A Cab at the Door* appeared last winter in *The New York Review,* and were greeted enthusiastically. In small doses Pritchett's chatter might seem to bespeak engaging ways of thinking about one youth, but to read the book through is a depressing experience. The autobiographer of childhood has many options, and Pritchett has only picked up the least interesting. One can try to make an interesting character of the child. One can ignore the child as a "self" and create his experience so intently that scenes and feelings are clear even though seen by one no clearer than "a nine year old." One can ignore both child and experience and concentrate on parents and other surroundings. One can filter the experience through the adult consciousness and attempt to discover the meaning of being young. But one had better not patronize or in any way indicate that the childhood was not worth having, and this is really what Pritchett has done:

> But we go to cold beef, for it is wicked to cook anything on Sundays —except Yorkshire pudding. This is sacred. Light as an omelette yet crisp in the outer foliations of what it would be indelicate to call crust, it has no resemblance to any of that heavy, soggy, pasty stuff known all over England and America by the name. Into it is poured a little gravy made of meat, and not from some packaged concoction. One might be eating butterflies, so lightly does it go down; it is my grandmother's form of poetry. Grandfather asks if I would like "a small bortion more"—Nonconformists often affected small changes of consonant, *p* becoming *b* and an *s* becoming a *z*; the faithful always calling themselves *uz,* the *z* separating them from sinners—and then asks his wife what she thought of the sermon.

The boy's experience, technically, organizes the paragraph—he has the pudding, then listens to grandfather—but there is no child here to have the experience, only the adult's chatter, the insufferable snot about the cooking not of one's youth, and absurd metaphor about eating butterflies. After a few paragraphs it is clear that what happened to Vic Pritchett no longer really matters to him; to go on

[1] A CAB AT THE DOOR, by *V. S. Pritchett.* Random House. $5.95. A LONDON CHILDHOOD, by *John Holloway.* Scribners. $4.50. A MASS FOR THE DEAD, by *William Gibson.* Atheneum. $7.95. TOMORROW WILL COME, by *E. M. Almedingen.* Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $4.95. STOP-TIME, by *Frank Conroy.* Viking. $5.95.

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talking this way is to be complacent in a way that amounts to self-contempt.

Pritchett can handle such criticism easily; at one point he says that something "expressed that unembarrassed seriousness about learning things which gives American life its tedium but also a moral warmth." How nice of us to take ourselves seriously, how dreary of him. Nowhere is Pritchett's failure to care more evident than in those places where he tries to convey a feeling of some intensity. At the very end he says he left England because he "could not bear the sight of it," and then, "I became a foreigner. For myself that is what a writer is—a man living on the other side of the frontier." But nothing in the preceding 243 pages shows us why Pritchett could not stand England or what frontier Pritchett as a writer is on the other side of. Whatever eating butterflies is like, I rather suspect it more closely describes reading this book than the taste of Grandmother Pritchett's Yorkshire pudding.

As for being unembarrassedly serious, John Holloway (b. 1920, London) is certainly tedious enough and, at moments, morally warm. The trouble with his book is that it is immensely difficult to read through, for a reason made clear at the beginning:

> I have told this story because for many years I thought my childhood a dull one. Now I think, at least in retrospect this is not so. Perhaps nothing is dull. I think the story may be of interest to others, because many others have grown up in much the same way.

But with autobiography, never trust the man, trust the child; there is no story here, only meticulous reporting about shops, furniture, parents' habits, and of course the result is dull. If one has to rely on the experience of one's reader coinciding with one's own, all is lost: "The Crabb household was a much more middle-class one than ours, and had a print of *The Boyhood of Raleigh* on the wall. They also had a parrot." This is not chatter, but is rather like a grocery list: "The scullery had only a biscuit sink with a brass cold-water tap; a black gas stove; a zinc 'copper' to boil the washing in; and a chair." Worse, when Holloway breaks up the catalogue, it is to offer gems like this: "To a child, the place he lives in is the heart of the world." Holloway is a good critic often, but this is a shame.

So too, in a totally different way, is William Gibson's *A Mass for the Dead.* Since my university recently granted a Ph.D. to a man with a thesis on Brian Moore, it can be assumed similar efforts on behalf or in spite of William Gibson are taking place somewhere. Still, the announcement that this is Gibson's best book will probably not be greeted with uninterrupted dancing in the streets. *The Cobweb* is a decent ordinary novel, *The Miracle Worker* and *Two for the Seesaw* are decent ordinary plays. *The Seesaw Log* is better, and it is now clear that Gibson needs to write directly about himself (b. 1914, Harlem

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while still white, then Queens). Sentence by sentence the writing can be pretty bad, especially in those parts of the mass turned over to "poems" and prayers:

> Disappearing under the shovelfuls of loose earth was mind that had created him, it had dwelt over him year after year like light at every opening of his eyes, surely it was immortal, and all between father and son, past, present, future, was therefore alterable. . .

And the sentence is just getting warmed up. Nor can it be said that in the more narrative sections Gibson exactly calms down. But what this breathless prose seeks is a way to connect everything, to render all moments so the intimate journey of boy and family can slowly be built. Here, for instance, in talking about his avid reading of trash as an early adolescent, the style begins to lurch to life:

> I see it was intolerance of myself; I was not reading so much as laying upon this pimple of my smallness, that bruise of my cowardice, this boil of my asexuality, the unguent exuded in every chapter by the puissant souls I put on for an hour.

A bit down the page we learn that a friend of his father's said he had "a very imaginary mind," which may be the case. But if you try to rewrite sentences like the above to clear it of its junk, you quickly lose everything which conveys the feverishness of the boy's reading. The two must go together:

> I was in any case scornful of her and my father for being so ignorant of the matter that had crept into my ear in the classrooms, great names, historic events, tidal thoughts they had never head of, when to me and my suave friend the word intelligent was synonymous with deserving of life. In the cafeteria I chortled at his mockery of our elders through mouthfuls of my mother's sandwiches, fondly made of wholewheat bread to guarantee my health, and thus fortified went home in the afternoons to bestow on her more of my polysyllabic disdain; when I once said to her coldly, "Do you doubt the veracity of my statement?" it was hooted back at me for six months by everyone in the family, but neither of my parents ever imagined how much of my disrespect was emulative of the boy they so admired.

That boy did permanent damage to the prose of this "imaginary mind," but Gibson knows and cares what he is talking about in a way that Pritchett and Holloway do not. In one section here the young man's efforts to rid himself of his parents' ways are filtered through the firm mesh of the grown man's discovered love for them, and it is stunning, the ironies and sympathies evoked with lovely simultaneity: sex, music, Brooklyn, writing, all seized upon as ways out, now seen as ways back, too. *A Mass for the Dead* is a big book by an ordi-

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nary writer who is also a fine man musing on the things that matter most to him. He makes his clumsy caring matter.

"As a person," E. M. Almedingen seems far less attractive than Gibson, but she writes much better and her way with her past is such that who she was or is does not matter much. She was born in 1898, *Tomorrow Will Come* was written in 1936, and probably in the nick of time. Her preface to the 1967 edition is sour, clear and simple about her loathing of the revolution and Soviet Russia, but the narrative is different, written with loving care of the blinding pain and loneliness that was her childhood and with little regard to what the adult writer "makes" of it all. Her father was a respected St. Petersburg intellectual who left when Miss Almedingen was two; her maternal grandfather was a renowned Russian litterateur with a passion for France. As a friend tells her during the revolution: "Your people may not have been important socially, but some of your connections were, and you never led the ordinary life of the rank and file, for all your poverty."

Even these details may be enough to indicate why after only a few pages the book seems like Sybille Bedford. The first third of the book is simply magnificent, sharp and poignantly seen vignettes in which the girl's way of seeing is everything—her older brother is drowned in an act of childish bravery, but we get the faces at the door, the hushed conversations, the worry for mother that precedes worry for self because the girl cannot fathom what has happened, then her first meeting with her father, and a move to a shabbier home. Like Sybille Bedford, Miss Almedingen takes each event for itself and assumes that if each experience is accepted fully the patterns must necessarily appear by themselves. In each scene the people are "there" so completely that they can barely be seen as personalities.

There is a slight falling off when the revolution comes and life becomes so crushing and grim and aimless that the narrative method itself is partially victimized by the staggering events. Hunger, marginal jobs, a rescue into the cloister of the University and even into a teaching position, typhus, relief work, Moscow and finally escape to Italy—there is no sense of history here because the girl could not have one, and the form is thus forced to imitate the effortful and empty quality of the events. The buildings become communal and people are moved endlessly and nothing is repaired; shops are closed, bread lines are long, clothes are made from curtains, the winters bring bitter cold and the summers epidemic. But none of this is seen politically because Miss Almedingen could not afford the luxury of a self, could not see the need for one beyond simple, pathetic efforts for people to be helpful to each other. No limited quoting can show how this all works so well. But here is a sentence:

> I heard his voice—'Mother, may I bring in my wife? She is outside,' and both the question and my mother's unhurried, quiet reply came to be graven in the memory even though, at the time, the mind

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> could not naturally grasp their import—'She shall be my daughter when she is your wife,' and I can see the door closing suddenly, violently.

V. S. Pritchett might have written those same words, but he never would have placed that "naturally" where Miss Almedingen does. Instead he would put it either just before or just after "the mind" and thus patronize the whole experience. Such is the delicacy of the line between respect and contempt in the rendering of one's youth. Miss Almedingen is unembarrassedly serious about what happened, so in her sentence there is no sense that the girl should have understood her mother, no snigger and no regret. This experience, the experiences in the book, her mind cannot naturally grasp, but that is her work's strength, and rare beauty.

Frank Conroy is in many ways even better. He has no revolution to serve as background, only modern America; he has no reputation as a writer or personage on which to capitalize; this is his first book, and he is thirty-two. He has no politics or sense of history either, so if he is a child of our time, he is so by reason of his personal qualities—brooding self-absorption, passionate vague desires to be free of self and others, "blinding" flashes of self-awareness which are his only form of self-congratulation. *Stop-time,* though, was clearly written at the right moment in Conroy's life. He does not try to make his childhood remarkable, but he does want terribly to understand it by making of its very ordinariness a sounding board for his reflections on being young. The other leading characters, mother and stepfather, are really only sketches, but Conroy shows they are that because they could never be more than that for the boy:

> Yet because almost every child is consistently bullied by older people he quickly learns that if in some higher frame of reference all commands are equally just, they are not equally easy to carry out. Some fill him with joy, others, so obviously unfair that he must paralyze himself to keep from recognizing their quality, strike him instantly deaf, blind and dumb. Faced with an order they sense is unfair, children simply stall. They wait for more information, for some elaboration that will take away the seeming unfairness. It's a stupid way of defending oneself, but children are stupid compared to adults, who know how to get what they want.

With that one does not have to rush off to one's own memory to see if he is "right"; he is obviously right in the same way Wordsworth is —in the act of reflection both man and boy are clear. Conroy has written his book at the right moment, when he is still in touch with the boy he was:

> Children agonize over an overdue library book or accidentally broken gas meter with all the emotion that an adult experiences at

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> the threat of prison. The dominating elements of life at home were anger, boredom, and disapproval. Unlike Jean and Dagmar I had nothing else. My defense was to retreat. I became vague around the house. I didn't see things.

The man in the service of the child—the converse makes for bad books, the distinction seems crucial.

Conroy has little sense of growing as such, and he does not have Miss Almedingen's heart-cracking power with episodes, but he is wonderful at parts of life, his experience with dogs, police, his one youthful triumph over life, as a yo-yo performer: "I was . . . finally free, in one small area at least, of the paralyzing sloppiness of life in general." And there is at least one very fine vignette that comes when Conroy assiduously stares at a girl through a shelf of books in a library, "a breast, a wrist, a curved hip become images of pure significance, passing directly into the tenderest parts of the brain," only to have scene and boy-mystic-gourmet of flesh explode when the incalculable appears:

> It was like straining to hear a faraway sound and having a gun go off in your ear. Her eyes were shut tight, tear-stained, squinting hard as if to avoid some overwhelming source of light. She wept, her mouth spread wide in a queer, tight-lipped smile of anguish, her head nodding slowly. I recoiled from the peephole as if a needle had pierced my pupil. In a frenzy of confusion I began sorting books as if nothing had happened. She had not seen me, I was safe.

It would be a shame to learn that only men could love such recountings—and there are many like this in *Stop-Time,* though seldom focused on a particular moment like this. But it takes no shock of recognition to see that if this book is useful to a sociologist or heart-warming to a New Yorker born about 1930, it is far from being only that. We all love our experience, if we knew but how to do so, and Conroy, whose life is neither remarkable nor attractive, has done something wonderful in seeing how to love his.

It is hardly possible to read five autobiographies of youth and avoid thinking about one's own, and it is an activity—for someone like me? for someone my age?—that leads to reminders of mortality. In daily life one's childhood is useful primarily as a weapon against one's children. We all set out to be better parents than our parents were, we settle for accepting the way we were raised as a standard against which to measure our children's growth. William Gibson at one moment juxtaposes two acts of "justifiable" parental brutality, himself the son in one and father in the other. Such juxtapositions may be enough in themselves to bring on the fear of dying. But what Gibson, Miss Almedingen, and Conroy especially offer is more than this grinding of generational gears, though that richest of all human subjects for literature is well served by all three.

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It is this sense of an opportunity seized at pretty close to the right moment that is impressive here. Between the end of youth's and the onset of age's powerlessness there comes for the best or luckiest and should come for all a time to grasp, to restore, and thus to create ourselves. "Whose little boy are you?" is the question asked young James Baldwin, and in finding his answer—"Know whence you came"—in *The Fire Next Time* Baldwin wrote a nearly great book in the midst of writing other mediocre ones. Imagine *The Prelude* written when Wordsworth was twenty, or forty; and *Great Expectations,* assayed too soon, turned into nothing more impressive than *David Copperfield.* Miss Almedingen would have hardened and simplified her memory if she tried to make it serve now. William Gibson apparently had to become rich and famous before he could say his mass for his dead parents, and by that time his style had rather gone out of control, but it is good he spoke as soon as he did. Conroy needed the audacity of writing his memoir young, at the beginning instead of at the end of his career. It is chilling that we must seize our experience this way else it will somehow turn away from us, but it is wonderful that these writers have known the right moment, done what they have done, given us themselves.

***Notes on Contributors** (cont.)*

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HERBERT LEIBOWITZ

Questions of Reality[1]

WHO, IN THE MIDST OF THE AWFUL, lunatic events of our times, has written political poetry that stands a chance of surviving both as effective political statement and great art? Neruda, certainly; Mayakovsky, Pasternak, and Voznesensky, among other Russian poets. American poets are conspicuously missing from any list we might draw up, for though a poetry of protest can be traced back at least as far as Whittier, who sought to rouse the conscience of America over the slavery issue, American poets have tended to avoid poetical comment on political issues, preferring to write about their domestic joys and strife, the domain of the inner man, keeping an arm's length from the political pit. Only Whitman has really felt comfortable in the role of poet as citizen, friend of political liberty and diagnostician of social ills, addressing himself, albeit in vain, as much to the elusive nation as to the individual in the brawny "powerful speech of resistance."

In a country ruled by a junta or a totalitarian government, the poet who speaks out against unjust policies risks the wrath of the secret police, and incarceration in prison or mental asylum. To tell the truth is literally a matter of life and death. Neruda wryly describes his falling out of official favor:

> When I was writing my love poems, which poured out from me
> everywhere, and I was dying from depression,
> nomadic, abandoned, gnawing the alphabet,
> they said to me: "What a great man you are, Theocritus!"
> I am not Theocritus: I took hold of life,
> and faced her, and kissed her until I subdued her,
> and then I went through the tunnels of the mines
> to see how other men live.
> And when I came out, my hands stained with depression and
> garbage,
> I held up my hands, and showed them to the generals,
> and said, "I do not take responsibility for this crime."
> They started to cough, became disgusted, left off saying hello,
> gave up calling me Theocritus, and ended by insulting me
> and assigning the entire police force to arrest me,

[1] THE LIGHT AROUND THE BODY, by *Robert Bly*. Harper & Row. $3.95. KINDS OF AFFECTION, by *Josephine Miles*. Wesleyan University Press. $4.00 cloth; $1.85 paper. NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, by *Jean Garrigue*. Macmillan. $5.95. AFTER EXPERIENCE, by *W. D. Snodgrass*. Harper & Row. $4.95.

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because I did not continue to be occupied exclusively with metaphysical subjects.

The art of poetry is dangerous to the State because it disinfects the lies of ideology and undermines established dogmas with the subterfuges of fantasy. The imagination, challenged by open and furtive oppression, responds defiantly with images of a gay, wild, surreal humor which bear witness publicly not merely to the possibility of a range of personal emotions interdicted by the State, but also to a belief that history is open-ended and changeable by the moral will. Who can read, or better still listen, to a Neruda or Voznesensky poem without being exhilarated by the largeness, compassion, and vitality of the man, that "I" which boldly attacks the authoritarian Cerberuses and refuses to be silenced? In Russia and Latin America, poetry is an act of conscience and self-expression *and* a communal experience; the poet identifies himself with the sufferings of the people and the people (a real part of his audience) feel a bond with the poet: it was the miners and workers in Chile who, by a sort of underground railroad, rescued Neruda from the hands of the police and spirited him out of the country to safety.

But in America, perhaps in any technologically advanced democracy, the poet speaking out as citizen against his government's inhuman policies, such as the Vietnam War, faces the crucial question of audience. To whom is he speaking? Surely not the common man or Dean Rusk. If his audience already shares his feelings and cause, his poem becomes either a gesture of demonstrably limited effect or a relief from his own intolerable moral frustration and political impotence. When there is no censorship and the poet's safety is not threatened by the publication of his political verse, it is hard for his voice to carry above the din of official lies and rhetoric.

Robert Bly is a case in point. His unequivocal anger and disgust at the Vietnam War, shared by most artists and this reviewer, shadow all the poems in his latest book, *The Light Around the Body*. His horror grips him with the tenacity of a longstanding psychic trauma; the terror of his despair is cumulative, etched in a series of menacing prodigies of nature such as the Hebrew prophets or Greek augurers might have interpreted: "horses are seen riderless at night"; black hands reach out and touch nothing; animals in panic run before a storm. These striking images, learnt from his master Neruda, substitute convulsions in nature for the dislocating events of history. Bly comes close to saying that we can be delivered from evil only by the intervention of the supernatural, some cleansing apocalypse, the purity of death. Yet the poems, in spite of intermittent successes, are dispirited, inconsolable, monotonous, and seem to prove Wallace Stevens' dictum that "In the presence of extraordinary actuality, consciousness takes the place of imagination."

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The failure is not one of nerve, for Bly has counseled and publicly performed acts of civil disobedience. What, then, goes wrong? I would suggest two answers: the absence of any audience of his countrymen, and a failure to link the language of the inner man with the language of outer events: a failure, in short, of intensity and poetic structure. Unlike Neruda, Bly finds it hard to make Theocritus speak in the fiery tongue of Jeremiah and Isaiah.

In his first book, *Silence in the Snowy Fields,* Bly is revealed as essentially a pastoral poet, a quietist, mystical, contemplative, and solitary. He has the religious man's awe in the presence of a nature which is vast, uncluttered, and beyond the straining ego; he frequently stands watching the landscape as the light wanes or snow falls, listening to sounds and silences. Few people intrude upon the poet's reveries; he prefers the company of birds and inanimate objects: old boards, stones, animal tracks, growing corn, barns. This appreciation of the still and the small is mirrored in the clean sparseness of the verse. Long before the Vietnam War, Bly, like Virgil, preferred the peace and isolation, the simple life, of the country to the noisy corruptions and sophisticated diversions of the city. Yet even in *Silence in the Snowy Fields,* anxiety gnaws at the fringes of his serenity. Death, violence, and worldly sins—and Bly has something of a Puritan rigor about him—invade his hermitage on the Minnesota farm. Walking or driving, the poet comes upon the "trapped earth" and a "falling into darkness." In their sleep, plants and woods obey a law of nature that man in his restlessness seeks to violate, and Bly, like Roethke whom he somewhat resembles, envies that repose. There are hints of a recessive longing for death: "I want to go down and rest in the black earth of silence." But his pleasure in observing the generative power of nature, in savoring his own self-reliance, and in sharing an occasional impetuous experience with wife and friends, gives him a joyful if reticent faith that the light will rise and cancel out the darkness. The poet is firmly in his own poems, possessing himself, not "asleep in the outward man."

This faith is lost in *The Light Around the Body.* Bly is unhinged by the cruelities inflicted on the Vietnamese people by America's military arsenal and moral indifference. His mind is haunted by images of ruin, waste, fallen houses, burnt bodies. America is lost or landlocked in a snowstorm, "not knowing which world it is in." A man of moral absolutes, Bly exempts no one from the collective guilt. We are all "captured by the spirit of the outward world," to quote Jacob Boehme, who supplies most of the book's epigraphs, lying in our dungeons reduced to behaviorist specimens—our minds without conscience, our acts without grief or reflection, our dismemberment without healing. Consequently, there is no forgiveness for America, no mercy, no prayer, not even that exasperated, complicated love that Norman Mailer has always displayed, most recently in *The Armies of the Night.*

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In pronouncing his malediction on an America whose history is one of duplicity, violent oppression, and hatred of all who bear a different skin, Bly indicts three principals: the generals counting small Asian bones in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta, the presidents like Teddy Roosevelt, Andrew Jackson, and John F. Kennedy who engaged in reckless military adventures, and most of all, an affluent society sliding from comfort to empty comfort while in insane torpor it sits in front of T.V. sets absorbing images of mutilation and death in callous silence, like modern citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. But when Bly starts accounting for this moral numbness and barbarism, his poetic language goes dead, like a vital nerve cut in half. The flat, declarative sentences do not represent the suffocating rhythms of a nightmarish world, but, curiously, are intoned in the drained emotion of some bureaucratic litany:

> We long to abase ourselves
>
> We have carried around this cup of darkness
> We have longed to pour it over our heads
>
> We make war
> Like a man anointing himself

It is as though Bly were afraid that rhetoric would be a treacherous lie, would deflect the reader from noting the ugly facts of his guilt, would, in fact, simulate the duplicity of the masters of war whom he denounces. This, I think, is a sincere but fatal mistake. For the poems are *inert and humorless,*[2] *the "I" disappearing almost completely. Which* does not elevate Bly's analysis to the status of objective fact, but rather shortcircuits it by depriving it of the moral energy which would give it social force. He contradicts in practice the precepts which Boehme teaches and which he quotes approvingly: "For according to the outward man, we are in this world, and according to the inward man, we are in the inward world. . . . Since then we are generated out of both worlds, we speak in two languages, and we must be understood also by two languages." But it is precisely the literalism of most of the poems in *The Light Around the Body,* their air of dazed and helpless protest at the juggernaut of American militarism, which is disconcerting. Against such heartless and evil men, one longs for some blazing up of Swiftian rage which would burst the bounds of the carefully notated but disconnected sentences and stanzas of such poems as "The Great Society," "Watching Television," "Those Being Eaten by America," and "Johnson's Cabinet Watched by Ants" (there is no logical movement between sentences, very little syntactical subordination and hence little moral qualification):

[2] In conversation and on the platform, Bly is an imposing and engaging figure, with a bearish sense of humor.

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Tonight they burn the rice-supplies; tomorrow
They lecture on Thoreau; tonight they move around the trees,
Tomorrow they pick the twigs from the clothes;
Tonight they throw the fire-bombs, tomorrow
They read the Declaration of Independence; tomorrow they are in church.

Alone with his grim thoughts, Bly does not speak to a community, and so, unlike the Russian poets, his speech turns back upon itself. In danger from the outward world, he retreats into the refuge of the inward man, there dreaming of a solution which partakes of the redemptive fires of Revelation and requires *miraculous* transformations:

When the smoke touches the roof of the cave,
The green leaves burst into flame,
The air of night changes to dark water,
The mountains alter and become the sea.

The rising of the spirit from death, like a halo or the "light around the body," promises the arrival of that uncreated communion between men, that respect for the sanctity of life so often prattled about and so little acted upon. But what are we to do until that day of divine interference if we do not share Bly's eschatological faith? The soldering together of the inward man and his life in history waits upon a descent into the "tunnels of the mines." As it stands, *The Light Around the Body* is an honorable failure.

Josephine Miles, in the poems of *Kinds of Affection,* as in her seminal critical study *Eras and Modes in English Literature,* is a cartographer who loves to lay out boundaries and periods, keeping clearly outlined those areas and margins where "difference blends into identity." Her delight in the well-trained mind and coolly expert eye lies in their capacity for discovering balance, reciprocity, and "one thought turning/ In expectation/ Its aromatic line." Although "complement is a rarity," there are enough times when "the edges meet and fit, the angles turn/ To complement, merge and sparkle, vein to vein." She is wary of "absolutes of last degrees," the greed for certainty; things observed at a distance are more easily measured and assimilated:

Truth is never
always
at times
ugly.
O absolute,
We find in you the harmony you demand.
O counter,
Snarl at necessity.
O friend.

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Miss Miles's imagination being sociable and mild, she almost never snarls at necessity. Rhetorical flourishes are held to a minimum. Acceptance of fact is the grounding for the questions she poses to herself, and since about whatever she scrutinizes she wishes to initiate discussion, like the experienced teacher she is, a reasonable informality is as much a part of her epistemological method as of her good manners. "So you are thinking of principles to go on,/ Principles of controversy," Alexander Meikeljohn asks her and then offers the principle of coherence, which she gratefully seizes and meditates on:

> Our mien of survival, to know our separate natures
> And allow them. Allow
> Dividing Light. Let be
> Candle and galaxy; the first word of them, logos,
> The wish to be.

Miss Miles follows her own advice. She knows when to cease inquiring and listen: "I sit by myself, turned inward,/ Just being." She is nonassertive but wittily persistent in search of a *modus vivendi* "in which we can prevail."

What Miss Miles favors is a sensible observation seasoned with the salt of good talk, whether it comes from the classroom, some updated Augustan *causerie,* or some friend of many years with whom she is on secure footing. If you ask "real questions," she believes, conversation, with its verbal give and take, can properly begin. Like Bly, she shies away from the confessional mode, for even when she comments, as in a humorous aside, "I've been going around everywhere without any skin/ And it hurts," this "personal flaying" is not for public exposure: she takes care not to overreact, concentrating on what is possible and salvageable in a difficult situation. Her subjects are drawn from everyday events—people attending a play at Stratford, Ontario; a housewife working to save San Francisco Bay for wildlife; talking on a telephone—and people are seen most often in their social roles and occupations: student, engineer, baseball player, mailman, participant in a meeting. Miss Miles has an unsnobbish affection for the gritty and ordinary as well as the refined and academic.

But the very reasonableness and quiet civility of the poems is also their weakness. Not only is there no sense of protracted crisis such as confronts Bly in *The Light Around the Body,* but all unruly emotions are defused, as if they would corrupt the answers she pursues with false questions. She is *too* moderate, giving the mistaken impression she has heard of chaos second-hand. And surprisingly in such an astute student of poetic style, the artifice that goes into rearranging the homely details and abstractions she selects is so unobtrusive that very little momentum is built up and her poems dwindle into a faintly musical prose. Pools of thought collect in the typical

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Miles poem in a balanced configuration, not at an intense center. Still, if she does not quite fulfill her own requirement: "To sense a beat of life not before known," she is an admirable surveyor of "the dry scope of foothill country."

Passing from Josephine Miles's poems to Jean Garrigue's *New and Selected Poems,* a gathering of twenty years' work, is like moving from a backyard garden to a tropical rainforest, from wit to passion, from Matthew Pryor, say, to Gongora. Where Miss Miles is content with affection, and her daylight poems are relatively undisturbed by emotional storms, Miss Garrigue, a love poet, is almost exclusively involved with her emotions, which are feverish and divided. She is vulnerable to every change in a lover's look or tone. What had been ecstasy and genuine turns, when love sours, into symbol, insincerity, the "ailing of being." Like D. H. Lawrence, she is sensitive to the promptings of the blood, those shifts from joy and power to a pride rising from "cold, infertile sources" which leave the ego hungering in "the prism of [its] fear." Man, like the centaur, is half intelligent creature, half beast, prey to an irresistible marauding will to deny or maim "beingness." There is "a clarity upside/ But a dark land thereunder," and again and again she excavates the "buried wish" to destroy that "lies in the film of flesh, a marrow of constancy."

A worshiper of the ideal of sensuous intensity, an invoker of absolutes, Miss Garrigue is condemned to shuttle between extreme states. The allure of her creed is stated best perhaps in "Primer of Plato":

> I saw then that beauty was
> Both for lover and beloved a feast,
> The lover mirroring by his joy
> That flush beauty brings, in
> His eye her actual face globed small,
> And beauty flattered by that glass
> Pitched to its highest comeliness,
> Doubled and increased until
> All would seem
> Derived back into first essence.
> Both animals and men dwell
> In such a mirror of the real
> Until in sudden ecstasy
> They break the boundaries of that glass
> To be the image each first was.

But to seek this paradisiacal "first essence" is to desire to be consumed utterly in the fire, to break those boundaries Miss Miles so carefully posted, to explore a "country without maps": an ultimate surrender to vision and illusion (the two are indistinguishable). When the vision dissolves, her misery and misfortune are to live in the "dark rooms

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of the soul/ From which all music's closed although it comes/ In gusts like dying leaves whose odor is/ A flask of virile sweetness saturate with/ The agony of fresh-had wounds in us." The beauty diseased, the joy fatuous, she is left with the "abashed resentments of the ego."

That Romantic urgency against which Bly and Miss Miles inoculated themselves is overpowering in Miss Garrigue's poems. As the passage above illustrates, the weather is almost always sultry and the air full of a heavy sweetness, as if from some exotic flower which induces doubt whether it belongs to a natural species. Miss Garrigue is an ambitious poet, aiming at complex, symphonic effects, and she is a formidable technician willing to use "every trick known to the over-wrought/ And half-Platonic specialist." The result, at least until *Country Without Maps* (1964), is very uneven verse, both within a single poem and an entire volume, which tires the reader with the monotony of excess. There is too much "wild percussion," too much delirious feeling—there are too many fanfares and too few of Bly's silences. Her chief fault, as, for example, in "For the Fountains and Fountaineers of Villa D'Este," is that she does not know when to prune the weedy outcroppings of her fancy. "Love is the sternest master of the school," she correctly notes, but she is not a stern enough master of her own words: they parade before us like archaic banners. The sumptuary must convince the skeptical reader that so much strenuous emotion is warranted and not just self-indulgence. The overingenious design of Miss Garrigue's poems cannot support so much emotion.

When she restrains her impulse to shock, however, when her self-consciousness is in abeyance, she writes finely and movingly. My favorite poems are "This Swallow's Empire," "A Fable of Berries," most of "Pays Perdu," "Address to the Migrations," with its controlled oratory, "Of a Provincial City," and "Nth Invitation." Miss Garrigue has a gift for song, and many of her best pieces are love ballads which either *Christabel*-like blend romance with black irony, or in the manner of songs in Jacobean plays express a macabre love-wit ("The Strike of the Night" and "Gravepiece"). Beginning with *Country Without Maps,* she achieves a comely lyrical calm; the shorter lines provide a welcome enlivening of the rhythm. She grows to appreciate simpler things, and this unneurotic acceptance may be due to her ability to now "By resolve build resource . . . love against the crazed impuse/ to hate." In the final poem of the volume, "The Flux of Autumn," the phantoms have not altogether vanished and she remains an unregenerate romantic, but she moves perceptibly closer to Miss Miles's position:

> The clarity of mountains is obscured
> By what we'd fortify that must be dreamed.

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Old territory, mapped and walked
Nightly, daily, in the impetuous eye
Of thought.
Until the dream's walked out.

After Miss Garrigue's rhapsodical verse, the poems in W. D. Snodgrass' new volume, *After Experience,* appear as dour and analytical as a Scotsman. The first ten or so poems strike the familiar note of *Heart's Neddle.* Again painful leave-takings, uprootings, and new plantings must be lived through, failures of love or marriage or art bared and absolved, so that he may put the pieces together and make a fresh start. His is a poetry of stress and tentative reconstruction. Rummaging in drawers, he is brought up short by a moldy wedding gown or chipped "plaster relic of the Aphrodite of Melos" which recalls some past dread or rancor with its cutting edge intact: "We are like patients who rehearse/ Old unbearable scenes/ Day after day after day." Only after reopening and inspecting the wound, "Gouging after some old/ Grief," can he apply the salve and move on. The incomparable benediction of love and the curse when it is lost, the unaccountable war between Prolific and Devourer for possession of his soul, particularly amazes him. In "Mementos, 2" he remembers his former wife as "Queen of May/ the goddess of our town," never dreaming that their proud love could ever be humbled:

That brillant hour
you stood, exquisite, tall,
for the imperious Power
that drives and presses all
seed and the buried roots
to rise from the dead year.

But how quickly the bride's "lead-foil crown" becomes "a crown/ of flowering thorn," and the "imperious Power" is buried under a "thick deposit/ of black coal dust"!

Although he has schooled himself to expect the worst, some domestic disaster or other still manages to surprise him, catches him looking the wrong way, even thinking gay thoughts. Miss Miles's principles of coherence and reciprocity are gingerly approached. Snodgrass is a cautious recipient of gifts. In "Leaving Ithaca," a charming, rueful poem, while packing his things again, Snodgrass wonders about the hardships of loyalty:

Lady, we've cost each other. Still, it's been
Lovelier than I would have dared ask here:
My own house, my own woman, this whole year—
Lovelier than things will likely be again:

That tell-tale "Still" (together with "Well," a sort of verbal shrug

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of the shoulders) indicates that experience has taught him that pleasure can be tasted only after the cost has been calculated, as though pleasure were not his due—and certainly not to be anticipated or sought after. Going over the wild farm grounds for the last time, he remarks, "No doubt it would have spoiled us to remain." His style of survival is an unbitter but glum humor, a casual autodidacticism which at times is disappointingly pat: "Well, we were always told/ Some feelings do endure."

If the world is not a place in which, to quote Snodgrass' translation of Gérard de Nerval's "Golden Voices," "life, from all things, bursts," is that sufficient cause for such thoroughgoing pessimism, for such a swarm of monitory thoughts? "The Platform Man," a stunning parable, offers some clues to the debate in Snodgrass' mind. Despite his handicap, the platform man appears to have an advantage which the poet quickly moralizes to himself:

> Some went too far and lost
> Things he was saved from wanting—
> Influence, love, applause.
> I'd travel light: take nothing
> Free and give no quarter.
> The curse is far from done
> When they've taken your daughter;
> They can take your son.

There is grave peril in aspiring too far, in being one of the shakers and movers of the world. The question is: does the spectacular vividness and inventiveness of the seeker, his chief contribution, compensate for the bad luck which rubs off on him and the misery he cannot stave off? "The Powers turn their back" and capriciously ruin the hero. The cripple, on the other hand, grotesque as he is, hangs on to life by begging and somehow gets "through doors and upstairs." But for the poet to shrink from ambition is tantamount to writing a scenario for tragedy, not the tragedy itself.

Fortunately, Snodgrass fights his own derisive jealousy of the intrepidity of those who, like the lovers flying their kite, venture "In these uncommitted regions/ On an invisible staff/ To run up an allegiance." In a series of brillant poems, he abandons the narrow purview of his household troubles and examines, in politics and history, man's fascination with, and pride in, his power to destroy "memory, desire, form." In "Inquest," "A Visitation," and "The Examination," he dissects "the abstract gray lie," indeed the totalitarian mentality which seeks to redo the brain so that the moral mediocrity of the normal will be established and man will learn "To fly no higher than his superiors fly" and to "still all gods in the firmament." It is the "rapacious stiff self-will" of that "enormous, damaged bug" man, which makes Vietnams possible, but Snodgrass sees what Bly

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will not acknowledge: "the old, lewd defiance of mankind" against tyranny. Man is a murderer but also an unrepentant subversive.

There is a harsh clarity and a harsh morality in Snodgrass' best poems. It is born of his sense that a person must totter and go under before he can live. He gives up the pompous virtues of the prudent man who thinks only of self-preservation, helped to this attitude by looking closely at several paintings, notably Manet's "The Execution of the Emperor Maxmillian" and Van Gogh's "The Starry Night." (Snodgrass has devised a style in these poems that goes far beyond any mere duplication of the painting: part documentary, part lecture on aesthetic techniques, part mood piece, and most important of all, part disquisition on character in history. The Van Gogh and Manet poems surpass, I think, William Carlos Williams' *Pictures from Brueghel.*) As Van Gogh says, gazing at the "fierce heaven,"

Chaos contains no glass
of our caliber
fusing
destroying
burning to be whole.

The mysterious fecundity of art is entangled with the mystery of death. There is "a calm even in catastrophe." Snodgrass discovers, after all, an operative principle to which he can stake a claim: the recuperative power of touch which informs "Regraduating the Lute," a love poem of generous feeling and rare lyrical intensity. By "Keeping the strings/ Tuned and under tension," the voice of the lute, like that of his love, can sustain a music "equal to any in the world."

Snodgrass began his career during the doldrums of the fifties when it seemed that every other poet was sitting in a confessional box or lying on his analyst's couch, composing some wry or decorous plaint about the latest domestic row. And while the talent was more brusque, *Heart's Needle* had all the marks of fashion: clever craftsmanship, witty rhymes, careful irony, the cultivation of private sentiment. What is news about *After Experience* is that without sacrificing what Henry James called the "felicity of scale" Snodgrass gives promise of shaking free of the academic (and those well-made quatrains) and regraduating his lute.

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GUY DAVENPORT

Provender from Cathay

OPEN A BOOK OF TRANSLATIONS of poetry and read: "My father said, 'A real gentleman keeps his visits brief, with no occasions on which he is shown the tomb of the Poet or the flowers of glass at the Museum. . . .' "—*Diceva mio padre, "Il vero/signore fa visite brevi,/ non occorre mostrargli la tomba/del Poeta o i fiori di vetro al Museo.* This is Mary de Rachewiltz translating Marianne Moore's "Silence":

> My father used to say,
> "Superior people never make long visits,
> have to be shown Longfellow's grave
> or the glass flowers at Harvard.

The Blaschka models of flowers in glass and Mt. Auburn Cemetery have been replaced by figures from a de Chirico still life, and a buzz of cultivated cousins and aunts by a correct Italian count. Mallarmé invented a cooler, less feverish Poe:

> *Notre entretien avait été sérieux et grave: mais, nos pensées, elles étaient paralysées et mornes, nos souvenirs étaient traîtres et mornes —car nous ne savions pas que le mois était Octobre et nous ne remarquions pas la nuit de l'année (ah! nuit de toutes les nuits de l'année!); nous n'observions pas l'obscur lac d'Auber . . .*

In the converting of energy systems a loss of heat is to be expected. Anxious to know how well our ignorance is being served, we focus on efficiency of conversion, and dismiss refinements and innovations as so much vanity. Yet from the translator's point of view the focus is on invention, on what a translated poem can manage to say in English. He has learned that his job is to repeat the original poem, and this is emulation, not imitation; that is, genius rather than technology. This is a hard theory and seems to say that scrupulousness and severe honesty go without either recognition or reward; what it says rather is that in the translation of a poem, essence, in defiance of all the laws of perception, acts independently of matter. Technology is therefore apt to abet rather than control the elusiveness of the poem as it is being translated, and art must supervene. Here, for example, is Christopher Logue translating Villon's *Dictes-moy où, n'en quel pays*:

> Where in the world is Helen gone,
> Whose loveliness demolished Troy,
> Sheba, Salome, and the wan
> Licentious Queen of Avalon,

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And where is she who could enjoy
Caesar—and Anthony enthral,
And she who bore God's only boy?
Where is the snow we watched last Fall?

And tell me anyone who can
The whereabouts of Heloïs
Whose so by love enchanted man
Sooner would risk castration than
Leave her; and was. Does Beatrice
Still cross the bridge at evencall?
And who is waiting for Lucrece?
Where is the snow we watched last Fall?

And where is Marilyn who crept
Into an endless reverie
Where death her comforted and kept
Safe in his arms until she wept?
Where is Sheherazade and she
On whom some people blame it all,
Delicious Eve, oh, answer me!
Where is the snow we watched last Fall?

Bird, do not seek to know from me
Who is the fairest of them all;
What would you say if I asked thee,
Where is the snow we watched last Fall?[1]

And the *Ballade des Pendus*:

This is the final statement we shall make:
Although we got no less than we were due,
Pity the likes of us, and God may take
Pity, my friends, upon the likes of you.
Observe us in the middle of the air,
Four rashers off a putrid barbeque,
The stink alone is quite enough to scare
You out of the wrongs you long to do.
So go down on your honest knees and swear:
"Be good to us—and we'll be good to You."

Your kids became our addicts and our whores,
We broke your strikes, and when the need arose
We bought your constables, we bent your laws,
How many witnesses we slew, God knows—
You stupid, vain, self-righteous, ugly bores!
We, the dynamic impresarios
Who gratified your soft, incarnate flaws.

[1] "Gone Ladies," a Gear Poster, Vandal Publications, London, 1966. The poster depicts Miss Monroe blowing a farewell kiss.

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If you should feel some recompense is due,
Mention us when you make that deal of yours:
"Be good to us—and we'll be good to You."

Gas, gunshot, Alcatraz, electric chair—
Only the best machinery could do
Justice to the exuberant despair
You legal felt for us illegal few.
Please do not let that absolution stun
Your dreaming hearts. It is high time you knew,
From Paradise to Pandemonium
There's but one different make of man, not two,
Crying outside the door of kingdom come:
"Be good to us—and we'll be good to You."[2]

The first, except for its being called into existence by the death of Marilyn Monroe, is not less literal than Rossetti's translation, and is much richer. The second, for all its being an *Einheitsfrontlied* (Brecht would have applauded it), is still a splendid translation of Villon. It modifies the subject as European painters have traditionally shown scenes from the Bible as if they were happening in Flanders or Siena; it is moreover all too easy to hide Villon's subject in fustian and convey no notion whatever of why Villon's society maintained a gibbet and a law to send people to it. The translator therefore must serve as both technician and poet, skimping neither skill.

Translation from the Chinese is the most luckless, bedeviled, and thankless enterprise in western literary history. Whatever you do sends sinologists into apoplexy, the general reader into ecstasy, and the critic into frustrated doubt and silence. There are days when it is clear that Ezra Pound's sins consist more of making poems of certain pages in Professor Fenollosa's notes on Chinese poetry than in protesting the Second World War over Radio Rome.[3] One can, like Mr. Alan Ayling, be provided with a crib by Duncan MacKintosh and have the expert advice of C. K. Lam, Lee Yim, Dr. K. P. K. Whitaker, and T'ung Ping Cheng, and still write, " . . . declining rays/Suffuse the imperial tombs of Han."[4] And: "Sad it is that all night long some lie awake alone." To keep reading, one has to imagine crisp and clear originals beneath Mr. Ayling's 1912 *chinoiserie*. His seventy-three examples of the *tz'u* lyric are taken from

[2] "Crime One," a Gear Poster, Vandal Publications, London, 1967. The poster depicts a group portrait of Ed Diamond, Legs Diamond, Fatsy Walsh, and Lucky Luciano.

[3] For the first account, after all these years, of how Pound translated *Cathay* from the Fenollosa notebooks, see Hugh Kenner's "The Invention of China," *Spectrum* IX:1, (1967).

[4] A COLLECTION OF CHINESE LYRICS, rendered into verse by *Alan Ayling* from translations of the Chinese by *Duncan MacKintosh*. Vanderbilt University Press. $7.50.

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the best known years of Chinese literature, a span that in the West ranges from *Beowulf* to Wordsworth. May not even his most ignorant reader object that such a range would indicate some fluctuation of sensibility, some modification of style, and that Mr. Ayling adds to our ignorance by making a poem written in 752 sound exactly like one written in 1803? Professor Frodsham of the University of Malaya and Mr. Ch'eng Hsi have taken a much lesser known period of Chinese to translate, that of the chaotic middle ages between the fall of the Han dynasty in the second century and the reunification of China in the sixth.[5] This is the period of the drunken and brilliant T'ao Ch'ien (365-427), sixty of whose poems were translated some years ago by William Acker in a charming book called *T'ao the Hermit,* and of the philosophical nature poet Hsieh Ling-Yün (385-433) who so influenced Tu Fu and Li Po. Professor Frodsham has dedicated his translation to the memory of Arthur Waley, whose example he scrupulously follows. Thus the illusion lives on that all Chinese poetry is *Imagiste,* wistful, unrhymed, *vers libre.* The illusion begins with Pound, who corrected it in the cunningly metred and handsomely rhymed *Odes of the Kingdom,* but it is Waley who, making a life's work out of a month of Pound's career, nurtured it and made it into an institution, until a scholar like Professor Frodsham, setting out on a four-volume anthology of Chinese poetry, finds himself with no alternative, apparently, and hopes to be found worthy of the master's will. Professor Frodsham is, however, an excellent scholar, and this anthology is a contribution of impressive dimensions, with incisive biographies of the poets.

In their introduction to the collected poems of Jorgos Seferis,[6] Mr. Keeley and Mr. Sherrard place Seferis among "such distinguished Greek poets as Solomos, Kalvos, Palamas, Sikelianos, and Cavafy." Panthelis Prevelakis, Odisseus Elitis, and Nikos Kazantzakis, all Cretans, are probably too countrified to get into a list of scholarly poets—Greek literature is still paranoically split between *Hellas* and *Roumeli,* Apollo and Demeter, between the Alexandrian and the ethnic heritages—but that they, and Kostas Kariotakis and yet others, constitute the spiritual world from which Seferis is speaking should make us wary of assessing single poets from a culture as deep and unknown as modern Greece. Indeed, Seferis, himself (like Kazantzakis) a translator of our literature into Greek, may be deceptively accessible because of the echoes in his poetry of French and English influences. If he sounds like Mallarmé, Messrs. Keeley and Sherrard

[5] AN ANTHOLOGY OF CHINESE VERSE: HAN WEI CHIN AND THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN DYNASTIES, translated and annotated by *J. D. Frodsham,* with the collaboration of *Ch'eng Hsi.* Oxford University Press. $7.00

[6] GEORGE SEFERIS: COLLECTED POEMS 1924-1955, translated, edited, and introduced by *Edmund Keeley* and *Philip Sherrard.* Princeton University Press. $10.00.

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translate him as if he were Mallarmé, so that a line like *bythismenoi mesa se katakhnies apo t' aspila phtera ton kyknon pou mas plegonan* (driven into mists by the immaculate beating wings of swans) gets translated as "plunged into mists by the spotless wings of swans that wounded us." Seferis is allusive, and there are notes provided to identify quotations and places. Some notes concerning modern history would not have been amiss for, say, the student who is not apt to see that the melancholy poem beginning

> The new moon came out over Alexandria
> with the old moon in her arms

hides an allusion to an ancient mariner as well as to a modern one, for the poem is dated, "Crete, Alexandria, South Africa, May-Sept. 1941," the time of the invasion and the evacuation. We need more translations as good as this one.

The historical frame of Pasternak's first successful book of poems[7] is equally crucial. His first two collections had been preciously conceived and preciously printed. *Sister My Life* is one of those miraculous leaps into maturity peculiar to a type of smouldering genius (Shelley, Van Gogh). It is dated *Summer 1917* and is therefore one of those responses to *La Terreur* (like Renoir's to the Franco-Prussian War) whereby the artist reflects nothing of the history exploding at his elbow and yet by insisting on his private vision reflects what was more important than anything else at the time—the continuity of sanity in a time of madness. The October Revolution came while the ink was still wet on the last poem of this thin volume. Moreover, it is dedicated to Lermontov. This is roughly the equivalent of Eliot's dedicating *The Waste Land* to Lord Byron. But it was Pasternak's way of turning his back on Mayakovsky and *agitprop* and Futurist monkeyshines. It was also his intuition that only the most personal poetry would survive the weathercock shifts of the Marxist culture cranks. Years later, knowing that cancer was soon to place him beyond the reach of the forces that sent his friend Mandelstam to Siberia, he spoke outward rather than inward, reconstructing the young poet who wrote *Sister My Life* and named him Yuri Zhivago. To translate these chiselled lyrics Mr. Flayderman has decided to bypass rhyme and meter and shoot for the imagery alone. If Pasternak's images were not polychrome and in sharpest focus, nothing at all would happen in these versions, for the translator in one line uses eleven English words to render three Russian ones, and such a maceration would melt the poems away altogether if they were not hardy of fiber. Still, one might wish that Mr. Flayderman could have found a form into which to translate these rich poems. What he has is a style I associate with the International Undergraduate Loose Line, that languid insistence that

[7] SISTER MY LIFE, by *Boris Pasternak*. Translated by *Phillip C. Flayderman*. Washington Square. $4.95.

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sincerity will get one as far as the heroic couplet got Pope, if only the reader will cooperate.

Vladimir Markov and Merrill Sparks have kept Pasternak's form with some measure of success.[8] Here is their version of a stanza,

O swaying with wet, fragrant branches
And drinking such bliss in the warm,
Dark evening, from calyx to calyx
A raindrop ran, dazed by the storm,

which Mr. Flayderman translates

Swaying on a scented branch,
Drinking in the dark this bliss,
A raindrop, dazed by thunder,
Ran from flower cup to flower cup.

Both are competent translations; neither is first-rate. It would, indeed, be ungrateful to ask of the formidable Markov-Sparks anthology that it reflect in high relief the styles of the poets it translates, for their achievement is first of all to have made (for 840 pages) order and clarity of half a century of Russian poetry, beginning with Balmont and the Symbolists and coming up by two routes—Soviet and maverick—to the present. The last three poets are nameless, as they are alive and wish to remain so. And it would be impudent to assess this labor as anything but an heroic gift to letters, its scope and weight far outbalancing any shortcomings it may have in particular translations.

The very modern Russian poets are a puzzle. We are assured that they are a phenomenon, that they are passionate and new. They roar like evangelists, they are living symbols, they herald a new spirit from inside a totalitarian state. "Andrei Voznesensky, Russia's foremost modern poet . . ." are the words opening Patricia Blake's and Max Hayward's bilingual edition[9] of the thirty-five-year-old Muscovite whose first work appeared only eight years ago. How seriously are we to take such wonderments? The translations are as thorny a barrier to understanding them as Russian itself. If, in flipping through an anthology of Victorian verse, we came across a poem beginning, "In these days of unheard-of suffering," we would flip right on. (That's Auden translating Voznesensky's "My Achilles Heart.") Can we not open any college literary magazine and find the equivalent of

[8] MODERN RUSSIAN POETRY, An Anthology with Verse Translations. Edited and with an Introduction by *Vladimir Markov* and *Merrill Sparks*. Bobbs-Merrill. $12.50.

[9] ANTIWORLDS and THE FIFTH ACE, by *Andrei Voznesensky*. Edited by *Patricia Blake* and *Max Hayward*, with an Introduction by *W. H. Auden*. Translated by W. H. Auden, Jean Carrigue, Max Hayward, Stanley Kunitz, Stanley Moss, William Jay Smith, and Richard Wilbur. Anchor Books. Doubleday. $1.95.

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Cigarette butts, a litter of
Spat-out sunflower seeds. . . .

They've rackets of their own
But I recite to them
About a girl who's crying
In the glassy night of a telephone booth.

And yet at his best, when he is glaring at *ekspyerimyentchiki* and *tsiklotroni* and wondering just what Russia really is beyond its self-righteousness and technology, Voznesensky smacks of the mellowed Estlin Cummings. The strange thing about the Russians, the novelists as well as the poets, is that within the ahistorical ideology of Communism they have to re-invent attitudes that the West has lived with continuously. That progress which chews up men in its process is not progress but retrogression has been a subject in our literature since 1840; Voznesensky, hurling the observation at Russian audiences in 1964, sounded like Isaiah witnessing before the Lord at Shiloh. If these young poets are trying to recover "the continuing radiance/They used to call 'the human soul'," they are basically trying to distinguish between country and state. Poets sing the one; brass bands and parades the other. Patriotism has never been the love of a state; how, anyway, does one love a trade union? Yevtushenko writes:

This is how I like it:
living here at Zima Junction,
waking before dawn, riding somewhere
on a lorry-tail among the scatterings
of grain, to drop off in the forest.

That is not huckleberrying; the poem is called "The Graves of the Partisans."[10] Vosnesensky is an Erewhonian ("One day in the future, ask someone:/'In Volume 3 of Voznesensky,/What is that creature, the cyclotron?'"); Yevtushenko has fulfilled a suspicion of Henry Adams' and written an encomium to a hydroelectric station. Both are equally Romantic, balancing their bitterness (as Mandelstam and Pasternak did not) with idealism. The new Russian poets are also serving an end which they themselves probably cannot see; they are giving modern Russia a new past. Poetry can only exist against a past, which is both its background and its soil. Voznesensky and Yevtushenko began to write by refusing to accept the official past, and the high ministers of correct history have doubtless not noticed that even the most politically innocent of poems can subtly re-arrange the past. Yevtushenko is wise enough to say that the Marxist posture of arrival is political make-believe, obliterating no past and insuring no future. The West, itself becoming ahistorical through indifference and an abandonment in the schools of the humanities, ought to be most

[10] POEMS, by *Yevgeny Yevtushenko.* Chosen by the author, translated by *Peter Levi* and *Robin Milner-Gulland.* Hill and Wang. $3.95.

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interested in these sophisticated and earnest young poets for their surprising freedom from political obsessions and for their ability to speak within a tradition that is as much ours as theirs. As long as Yevtushenko, as untouched (to judge from his autobiography) by Christianity as by Wordsworth or Heraclitus, can still write:

> The world is everlasting.
> The living, thinking of the dead,
> the dead, of the living,

we can count him among the poets and keep our faith in the universality of the poet's intuition.

The Czech poet and distinguished pathologist Miroslav Holub seems to have survived both freezes and thaws by quietly keeping his eye to his microscope. Like other doctor-poets—Gottfried Benn and William Carlos Williams, whom, surprisingly, he has read, come to mind—Holub writes a delicately tense, finely observed line.[11] He requires of every poem that it be acid and dry and as fine as watchworks. His comments are intelligent rather than wise or ironical; he speaks from the solicitude of a man who knows death too intimately not to value life as an absolute gift. He is like Klee in his imagery, marrying a clear seriousness with a stylized whimsy:

> and aspens pattered
> their leafy Ur-language.

> The trees parade through the town
> like prophets.

Nicanor Parra, the Chilean poet and Professor of Theoretical Physics at the Instituto Pedagogico of the University of Chile, is something of a mirror image of Miroslav Holub.[12] He is wild where Holub is controlled, hot where Holub is chill, and yet he makes the same kind of *Merzbild* abstractions. He is not, however, content, like Holub, with one perfect image; he is as prodigal a list-maker as Whitman (but no kin otherwise). He is perhaps a *deuxième vague* surrealist; he is certainly a high practitioner of the Latin American black humor that is like nothing else in the world ("a well-planned earthquake," "I have bought a plot of land not far from the slaughterhouse, she exclaimed") whereby coffins, mummies, and skeletons darken Parra's thoroughly modern pronouncements until he seems to be more of a sombrely troubled folk artist than a physicist who writes poems. Parra has pushed the extremes of his

[11] SELECTED POEMS, by *Miroslav Holub*. Translated by *Ian Milner* and *George Theiner*, with an Introduction by *A. Alvarez*. Penguin Books. 95¢.

[12] POEMS AND ANTIPOEMS, by *Nicanor Parra*, edited by *Miller Williams*. Translated by Fernando Alegría, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, James Laughlin, Denise Levertov, Thomas Merton, W. S. Merwin, Patricia Rachal, Miller Williams, and William Carlos Williams. New Directions. $5.50 and $1.95.

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mind as far apart as possible: the poet in him identifies with shamanism:

> My relations with religion?
> I crossed the Andes on foot
> Disguised as a Capuchin friar
> Changing rats into doves.

The two reaches of Parra's mind are probably equivocal, and his poetry happens where they overlap in an all but inaccessible back part of his mind, the inwards of the psyche and the nucleus.

Pablo Neruda, also a Chilean, shares Parra's surrealistic background.[13] *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* has a deeply respectable lineage as a poem; it is a meditation on a ruin, and is therefore related to a Romantic genre that goes back to the seventeenth century and even back to the classics. Neruda's transformation of his theme looks back more to past suffering than to past splendor. Macchu Picchu, discovered in 1911 by Hiram Bingham, is an almost blank archeological fact: it is Inca, it is there:

> the tallest crucible that ever held our silence,
> a life of stone after so many lives.

Mr. Tarn's translation attempts to hold the mysterious tone of Neruda's meditation, and for the most succeeds in keeping Neruda's shadowy transparencies. In places he allows English poetic diction to blur some of the stark outlines of the original. For instance: *El reino muerto vive todavia* (the dead kingdom still lives) is translated, "The fallen kingdom survives us all this while." So rich a poem requires an accomplished translator, and has found one in Nathaniel Tarn, who recognizes and understands the greatness of the poem.

Another long poem from the prodigious forests of South America (which since Hudson's *Green Mansions* have replaced the ravaged ones of North America in the literature of the Atlantic culture) is Jules Supervielle's *La Fable du monde,* seven parts of which James Kirkup translates in the admirable compendium[14] New Directions has gathered of Supervielle's poems and prose. There is no rarer virtue in modern poetry than Supervielle's *pietas* before nature, God, the sea, myth, children, and animals. His mind was of a harmony; almost alone among modern poets he wrote about God without the least sense of alienation. There is something of Milhaud in him, of Max Jacob, of Cocteau; ultimately, however, he cannot be explained by influences. His translators realize that he is one of the processes of light, and work for the most with a high order of invention, especially Kirkup, who manages little miracles from time to time.

[13] THE HEIGHTS OF MACCHU PICCHU, by *Pablo Neruda.* Translated by *Nathaniel Tarn.* Introduction by *Robert Pring-Mill.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.50.

[14] SELECTED WRITINGS, by *Jules Supervielle.* Translated by James Kirkup, Denise Levertov, Kenneth Rexroth, and Alan Pryce-Jones. New Directions. $6.75 and $2.75.

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It is Supervielle's simplicity of diction that eludes them. They have, however, made one of the best of modern translations.

Michael Hamburger's Hölderlin is a kind of ongoing institution.[15] He published his first translation of the great Romantic classicist in 1943, when he was eighteen, got out a more thorough edition in 1952, and made a plain-prose version (in which nevertheless he inserted disguised metrical versions) for Penguin Books in 1961. Now he brings out a 600-page complete Hölderlin in the original metres. "Free imitation, in our time," he says in his introduction, "has become a kind of occupational therapy for poets partly or temporarily disabled." Even so, is "You, old Sea-God, I visit and you I greet in your stillness." English? An earlier version of this line read: "I come to you, ancient Sea-God, and greet you in your stillness." But such *tradimenti* are scarce, and the monumental achievement stands clear—something comparable to making a replica of the Acropolis in Portland cement as reconstructed in the three-volume thesis of a German classicist. These heroic hymns contain Romanticism's dream of Greece in its purest and perhaps its most beautiful form. Mr. Hamburger, whatever else one wants to say of this translation, keeps that sweetness whole.

That other great Romantic classicist, the melancholy and pessimistic Leopardi, worthy of sharing with Hölderlin and Shelley a chaste temple that a civilization more harmonious than ours might have built to embittered enthusiasm, fares less well than the mad Swabian in the new translation of his selected poetry and prose by John Heath-Stubbs and Iris Origo.[16] There has been a severe need for an edition of Leopardi—Mr. Heath-Stubbs' introduction, comparing Leopardi with André Chénier and Walter Savage Landor, is an admirable and astute consideration—and in many ways this is an excellent presentation. But just as Mr. Hamburger's Hölderlin is not as baritone and grand as it might have been, Mr. Heath-Stubbs' Leopardi is melancholy instead of melancholy and savage. In *The Broom* (surely a psychologically false title for *La Ginestra—The Sedge Grass? The Broom Sedge? The Wild Grass?*) Leopardi's lurking snake *nestles,* and when it writhes (*si contorce*) in the sun, Mr. Heath-Stubbs has it peacefully coiled. Which is not to say that Mr. Heath-Stubbs misunderstands Leopardi; he understands him both sensitively and accurately, but lacks the inventiveness in English to accommodate the full range of Leopardi's violent contrasts of light and shadow.

The translator who can turn medieval Irish into:

[15] FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN: POEMS AND FRAGMENTS, translated by *Michael Hamburger.* Bi-Lingual Edition with a Preface, Introduction, and Notes. University of Michigan Press. $10.00.

[16] SELECTED PROSE AND POETRY, by *Giacomo Leopardi.* Edited, translated, and introduced by *Iris Origo* and *John Heath-Stubbs.* New American Library. $7.00 and $1.25.

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Signs do not stop me setting out
—Did someone sneeze?—for my last breath
will be when foot compulsively
treads the awaiting sod of death.

I fear no more to walk alone;
let world which shaped me, gave me birth,
take not untimely back but wait
for nut-ripe falling to the earth

is a translator indeed, high among his calling. Time is of such a stillness in Ireland, and language so plastic of idiom, that the present can reach into the past as easily as a hand into a pocket. No stained-glass diction intervenes, no wistful hankering. Mr. Carney[17] translates from medieval Irish and Latin with an ease that identifies him as a scholar and a poet, and no less one than the other. This little book of forty-one poems is all too short; we hope for more to come.

Without translation, George Steiner says in his Penguin anthology[18] of modern translations of poetry, "we would live in arrogant parishes bordered by silence." Translation is therefore a sign of the parish's curiosity and a crucial category in an inventory of its mind. Our age, says Mr. Steiner, is as diligent and inventive in translation as the Renaissance; his anthology offers handsome proof of it. At the center of all this brilliance, Mr. Steiner demonstrates, is Ezra Pound, acting as master, agitator, and teacher. Most of the ninety-three translators here displayed are Ezratics of one stripe or another (and the one serious omission from the company is Louis Zukofsky). That is, these are translators who have responded to a poem with a poem—one dimension of our kinship with the age of Chapman. Another is the range of languages in which we can find poetry congenial enough to respond to. Translation, after all, is importation. If the transfer modifies our knowledge, a modification of culture follows, else we are simply collecting, like Victorians bringing home bits of India and China. It is too soon to know if we are like the Renaissance. It is likely that we are only a scholarly extension of the energies of the Renaissance. The pulse of energy after 1915, which Pound kept high for forty years, was prepared for, as Mr. Steiner shows, by Edward Fitzgerald, Rossetti, and Francis Hueffer. Innovation has now given way to an institutionalized revolution. Translation at the moment is undoubtedly brilliant and productive. But translators of genius—Michael Alexander (whose *The Earliest English Poems,* translations from the Anglo-Saxon, came out as a Penguin three years ago), Christopher Logue, Louis Zukofsky—are, as perhaps they shall always be, rare.

[17] MEDIEVAL IRISH LYRICS, selected and translated by *James Carney*. University of California Press. $5.50.

[18] THE PENGUIN BOOK OF MODERN VERSE TRANSLATION, introduced and edited by *George Steiner*. Penguin Books. $1.65.

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EARL MINER

Splendid Things

In 1953, Donald Keene published his still useful little book, *Japanese Literature.* Neither *The Pillow Book* nor *Essays in Idleness*[1] is as much as mentioned there. And yet before the war a student of a Japanese Higher School (*germanice,* Gymnasium) would have begun his acquaintance with classical Japanese prose by reading *The Tosa Diary* (Ki no Tsurayuki's *Tosa Nikki*) and then proceeding to these works, with *The Diary of a Hermitage* (Kamo no Chōmei's *Hōjōki*) coming between them. That none of these was mentioned by Keene fifteen years ago and that two of them can yet appear with such aplomb today is a measure of the distance we have travelled toward an understanding of Japanese literature. And it is a token of our debt to Donald Keene, Ivan Morris, and other distinguished translators of their generation. The translations and retranslations appearing one by one—or now, it seems, two by two—also add to our understanding of the range of literary possibility.

Both works belong to a genre of prose meditation or pensée for which there is no exact Western counterpart. The Japanese term, *zuihitsu,* means something like "following the brush" or "flowing writing." Such works have an air of casual, intermittent jottings and yet possess a Japanese sense of form and fitness. Apart from the difficulties with which Japanese scholars themselves wrestle in discussing the form, there is much that is unknown about the authors and the original forms of their works. It may not be amiss, therefore, to attempt to set the two works in their larger contexts.

The Pillow Book (*Makura no Sōshi*) treats events that occured between A.D. 986 and 1000, a period when court ladies dominated the literary scene. Japanese literature as we know it begins with poetry, as do most traditions, and the first great works are collections of verse, the *Man'yōshū* of about 785 and the *Kokinshū* (the first imperial anthology) of about 905. About 935, Tsurayuki set down *The Tosa Diary,* an amalgam of prose and verse, the first work in the language that can be termed prose fiction. Sei Shōnagon wrote when the court was at its zenith and, if she does not mention the great authors among her contemporaries, she herself is described with some acerbity in *The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu.* Murasaki Shikibu, the reputed author of the greatest work of Japanese literature, *The Tale of Genji,* also criticizes Izumi Shikibu, the greatest poet of the time and the reputed author of *The Diary of Izumi*

1 THE PILLOW BOOK OF SEI SHŌNAGON, translated and edited by *Ivan Morris.* Columbia University Press. 2 Vols. $20.00. ESSAYS IN IDLENESS: THE TSUREZUREGUSA OF KENKŌ, translated by *Donald Keene.* Columbia University Press. $6.50.

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Shikibu. Three centuries and more later, when the court had lost most of its power and women their dominance of literature, the priest Yoshida Kenkō compiled his *Essays in Idleness.* It treats events between 1319 and 1336, a twilight period cast between the dissolution of court civilization and the establishment some time later of the military aristocracy of the Muromachi shogunate. The tonal, thematic, and stylistic differences between the two works reflect the differing experience of their times and authors, although both are often considered together as great exemplars of the *zuihitsu* genre.

Both are works of many semi-independent parts. *The Pillow Book* contains above three hundred sections, *Essays in Idleness,* 243. Some are very brief, some a number of pages in length. Some (164 in *The Pillow Book*) are mere lists; others have the character of anecdotes or short stories. Many sections are autobiographical in purport; others consist of esthetic or moral reflections. But all have that unity of perception suggested by Sei Shōnagon's remark that she has written of "that which has happened before my eyes or transpired in my heart" (my translation). As Japanese scholars recognize, such works are cousin german, perhaps niece and nephew, of the art diary which, as opposed to the mere journal, was but loose in chronology, capacious enough to contain reflections of many kinds, and graced by poems (*The Pillow Book* has more than 130). Both of the works now considered are, however, less narratives than remembrances interspersed with meditations and comment. Both are presumed to have been reordered from the original forms. Donald Keene preserves the traditional order of the sections of *Essays in Idleness,* an order dating only from the seventeenth century, though the oldest extant manuscript takes us within a century of Kenkō. Ivan Morris has been bolder with *The Pillow Book.* He freely reorders and divides it into 326 sections, whereas the chief Japanese editions he relies on divide it into between 301 and 348 sections of rather differing order. Both works, and especially *The Pillow Book,* therefore resemble Pascal's *Pensées* in being unquestioned classics of uncertain organization.

Both are known in partial but outstandingly fine English translations. Forty years ago Arthur Waley translated about a quarter of *The Pillow Book.* His version still sells for 10s. 6d. Sir George Sansom translated *The Essays in Idleness* almost in its entirety in 1911, and there is a less complete version by Ryukichi Kurata, *The Harvest of Leisure,* still for sale at 7s. 6d. Some readers may doubt the need for these new, expensive versions. But even if, for example, Waley had translated the whole of *The Pillow Book,* a new version would be welcome a generation later. Moreover, the versions by Morris and Keene are new in kind. They have not, of course, included the original on facing pages, but in other respects both have given us translations that are in a sense editions, with introductions, notes and, in Morris' case, a large number of amplifying appendices. The notes, like the translations themselves, incorporate the wealth of Japa-

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nese commentary accumulated over the centuries. In the unlikely event that a reader may feel that Ivan Morris has been too generous, he should know that although the two volumes of this "edition" of *The Pillow Book* comprise about six hundred pages, the edition which Morris (like Waley before him) draws upon most heavily contains well over 1100 pages. As a result, *The Pillow Book* is not so much a bedside book as a book for the student, although the general reader and the scholar have not been forgotten. Donald Keene's approach is rather the same, although he has a longer introduction and less annotation.

All this is not to deny that the translation is the thing for both works. Now, no reviewer could put his hand on his heart and declare that these new versions are stylistically superior to those of Waley and Sansom. But the new ones are complete and more up-to-date in reference to Japanese scholarship; moreover, they do measure up to the standards set by their great predecessors. The heavier annotation does not in itself render the translations more attractive, but it does make them more intelligible and, therefore, more meaningful. For such meaningfulness Professors Morris and Keene deserve the wholehearted thanks of everyone interested in the classics of major literary civilizations.

What is it, however, that entitles these works to the rank of classics of their kind? It must be confessed that the essential critical question—indeed, the basic human question—is not given a very direct answer by either translator. Ivan Morris leaves the question unasked, or perhaps he intends his translation of *The Pillow Book* to speak for itself, with a chorus of notes and appendices. What the reader finds at once is a work of extraordinary immediacy, and of that distinction of individual perception of the world its author knew, which we characterize in terms of style or personal vision. Sei Shōnagon is quite clearly an original, as distinctive as Saint Simon or Pascal, as John Aubrey, Pepys, or Boswell. Like them, she is everywhere recognizable as herself and everywhere speaking in a distinct voice. Efforts to imitate such of her lists as "Embarrassing Things" are as doomed as attempts to reproduce Aubrey's accolades of "ingeniose" people. It seems so easy.

> A man whom one loves gets drunk and keeps repeating himself . . .
>
> Lying awake at night, one says something to one's companion, who simply goes on sleeping . . .
>
> An adopted son-in-law who has long since stopped visiting his wife runs into his father-in-law in a public place.

It seems so easy, but it involves insight, economy of style, and a re-creation of a society belonging to us only in the re-creation. The second example implies ladies in court service, the third marriage customs not ours. What it comes down to is a distinction of style

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and an insight into the springs of human conduct that are fundamentally moral, because both assess human values and behavior. Professor Morris deserves praise for preserving this most essential characteristic of *The Pillow Book*.

There are other literary questions I should have liked raised. Is *The Pillow Book* open or closed—was it written for personal reflection or for appreciation by others? The answer from numerous kinds of evidence is that it was clearly intended for others. The fact determines the nature of various personal reticences or poses. It explains the formal respect to the imperial house. How much sympathy does Sei Shōnagon show her fellow human creatures? She is largely bound by her class mores to favorable estimation of the "good people" (*yoki hito*) or "respectable people" (*yoroshiki hito*). All the same, her intermittent contempt for lower classes does not preclude sympathy, a sense of human bond greater, for example, than that of Andreas Capellanus in his *De Amore* on Western courtly love. What principles of coherence give form to *The Pillow Book?* The answer is unclear, although Ivan Morris seeks to find some by reordering and arranging sections. Certain kinds of pensée, certain kinds of observation, recur; whether from the author's hand, as seems likely in some cases, or from an editor's hand, as seems likely in others, some sections flow associatively in groups. What, finally, are the values of *The Pillow Book?* The answer is shown throughout to be fineness of sensibility, perception, and observation. Human life is enhanced by acute understanding, esthetic definition, and frequently by representation in poems. *The Pillow Book* is very much of the age of *The Diary of Izumi Shikibu, The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu,* and *The Tale of Genji.*

Donald Keene's introduction to Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness* goes farther in dealing with such questions. He very well defines the way in which Kenkō exemplifies the esthetic preferences and canons of classical Japanese literature, making it to some extent a courtesy book for the Japanese aristocrat. He is no doubt right in suggesting that this is so much a general tendency of the whole that it cannot be demonstrated by any single section. But the third section gives a rude idea.

> A man may excel at everything else, but if he has no taste for lovemaking, one feels something terribly inadequate about him, as if he were a valuable winecup without a bottom. What a charming figure is the lover, his clothes drenched with dew or frost, wandering about aimlessly, so fearful of his parents' reproaches or people's gossip that he has not a moment's peace of mind, frantically resorting to one unsuccessful strategem after another; and for all that, most often sleeping alone, though never soundly. But it is best that a man not be given over completely to fleshly pleasures, and that women not consider him an easy conquest.

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This esthetic or courtesy-book theme is set down in a "Heian" style akin to Sei Shōngaon's and is shared with earlier diaries and tales. Japanese distinguish, however, a second style; and from it we may distinguish a second theme. This is a "medieval" style embodying a Buddhist view of life. This style is more abstract, more "Chinese," echoing Buddhist commonplaces of flux, transitoriness, causation, and illusory existence. Such concerns demand a response different from a social or esthetic fineness. Asceticism or Buddhist *pietas* while yet in the world are what is required. Kenkō was a skillful if not outstanding poet, and so he is well able to express man's relation to nature, the weight of time—how he longs for the past!—and immutable laws governing man in a metaphysical world. The structure of *Essays in Idleness* may well not be Kenkō's, but in following the traditional arrangement, Keene allows us to see the pattern of groups of pensées and the associations flowing between them which either the author or a subsequent editor has given the sections.

I hope that these remarks suggest that Ivan Morris and Donald Keene have given us truly important versions of major works. The significance of the originals is sustained in translations of great assurance and is buttressed by annotation possessing authority and a fine sense of relevance. It must also be said that Columbia University Press, which is not over-famous for book design, has served both works well, apart from the rather Mondrianish dustjacket for *Essays in Idleness* and the very dim plates for *The Pillow Book*. A reviewer is to some extent forestalled in praise or comparison by translations dedicated by the translators to each other. But it may be said that Ivan Morris has had, not indeed the easier, but perhaps the more agreeable, task with *The Pillow Book*. His devotion of five years to this work has made his translation a delight and his notes a treasury of detail about a fascinating period of Japanese history. By now everyone knows of Donald Keene's extraordinary range or versatility, not to say productivity; but what at least this admirer prizes most is the spontaneous enthusiasm Keene shows for Japanese literature. Kenkō's sober meditative tone has rather modulated than suppressed that attitude of discovery. Perhaps it is not amiss to say that many of us hope that his enthusiasm will sustain him, and soon see him to the end of the history of Japanese literature on which he has been working for several years. Till then, and for many years more, we may adopt Kenkō's veneration for the great works of the past, and place both of these translated classics in Sei Shōnagon's appropriate category of "Splendid Things."

It may be added that the author herself included in that category "a learned Doctor of Literature"—as also that she included that title among "Words That Look Commonplace but That Become Impressive When Written in Chinese Characters." In this and much else, she knew us before we knew her.

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CALVIN BEDIENT

The Victorians: How the Lamb Ate the Lion, and Why the Peacock Didn't Care

IN *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern*,[1] Albert J. LaValley stresses the "radical self-questioning," the "shifting sense of roles or 'masks,'" the "urge to define a total self and a new society," in Carlyle's work. No wonder, then, that his book never quite breaks through into the bold, open, capacious, and dominant reality of that work, but, instead, remains wrapped in a cloud of its own fashionable terminology—"myth-making," "the problematic, the tentative, and the exploratory," the "endless quest for identity," and so on. Doubtless there were breaks and failures in Carlyle's identity; so are there gaps and trailing thinnesses in the highest waterfalls. What is remarkable about Carlyle, what assails us in each of his books, is precisely the radiant force of his identity. Open him to almost any page; you find a torrent of power, a thunderous self-assurance, an impression of overwhelming unity. For Carlyle had not only the burden, he had the grace and authority of a mission. And this grace and authority he discovered in Leith Walk at the same time that he discovered his "everlasting" identity—the free, proud, defiant energy of his being. What he was ever afterward to broadcast into the world was his conviction of his own "God-created" power. He spoke of poets and prophets of Force, of an Aristocracy of Force, of a Universe of Force; but his every message was himself.

Carlyle's originality as a Victorian was to spiritualize Force—to make it congruous with "Infinite . . . Duty." He wedded Paganism, which "emblemed chiefly the Operations of Nature," with Christianity, which "emblemed . . . the Moral Law of Man." But his age was tuned to receive only the moral notes of this striking medley. And even Carlyle's moral spirituality was too ambitious for the times. It shaded into the mystical, the metaphysical—and though the Victorians were open to many things, they had no vocation for wonder. For the most part, their spirituality was rational, humanistic, close-hauled—confined to the "human lot." Occasional fumes of sentimental reverence leaked up into the heavens; but what were these to Carlyle's rude shouts of kinship with the Infinite? Here was a man of "transcendent wonder," a man mystical and savage. The earth he walked on, the stars he looked at, were "alive and miraculous." "Our mys-

[1] CARLYLE AND THE IDEA OF THE MODERN: STUDIES IN CARLYLE'S PROPHETIC LITERATURE AND ITS RELATION TO BLAKE, NIETZSCHE, MARX, AND OTHERS, by *Albert J. LaValley*. Yale University Press. $8.50.

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terious relations to Time and Space, to God, to the Universe" goaded him into fiery speech. He was possessed by that two-fold vision of reality—of a Universe at once motionless and whirling, eternal and temporal, real and apparent—which, as Evelyn Underhill has shown, is characteristic of the mystical vitalist. And thus he walked the streets of London like a lion that had wandered in from a wilderness. But though he roared and roared, he was merely lionized.

Because mystics are always anomalous, the offspring of eternity, Carlyle eludes the classifications of time. And equally elusive is LaValley's title, *The Idea of the Modern*; for "the modern" in his book is never so fine a thing as an idea. ("For a discussion of this topic, consult the bibliography....") There is reference, it is true, to "a dominant modern tradition, that of the artist as problematic prophet"; but this tradition hardly amounts to "the modern," and, in any case, the theme that gives it true continuity—heroic vitalism—has already been brilliantly treated by Eric Bentley. And just as it is Carlyle's moralization of Force that makes him Victorian, so it is simply his vitalism, and not his "self-questioning," that makes him modern. His invocation of "abysses of mystery and miracle," in both Nature and the Unconscious, proved to be a false dawn in English literature; but in D. H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas and Joyce Cary, it at last became a true one. Yet that was some time ago; and now even vitalism has paled into darkness.

Though Carlyle is not included in *Victorian Minds*,[2] the book takes in many of his fellow Victorians. A collection of bland and elegant essays, it has an air of ambling Victorian leisure, partly because Professor Himmelfarb has a penchant for patient unravelling—whether the complexities and self-contradictions of a Malthus or a Mill or the varieties of Social Darwinism. The best of the essays have the common purpose of exposing "subtleties, complications, and ambiguities"; what is often lacking, however, is a pressing reason for exposing them. At the end of the essay on Bentham, for example, she writes suggestively: " . . . the conventional view of Philosophical Radicalism as the genesis and prototype of our democracy may have to be reconsidered." But evidently it will have to be reconsidered by others. Very often the match goes out, in just this way, before the fuse has been lighted. Nearly all the essays end with "meaningful" glances at our modern situation; but most of these turn out to be merely blank, portentous, or intellectually coy. Thus the author writes: ". . . *On Liberty* may seem less pertinent to later generations confronted with revolution, war, tyranny, and social and moral upheavals." But one would think that just the opposite is true: that *On Liberty* would be especially useful to generations whose liberty is so obviously threatened.

Two of the essays concern the Victorian "ethos"—the replace-

[2] VICTORIAN MINDS, by *Gertrude Himmelfarb*. Alfred A. Knopf. $8.95.

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ment of religion by middle-class morality. And Professor Himmelfarb is right to argue that the enshrinement of morality is the keynote of the age. Why was this so? The author suggests that "Victorian morality was a consequence of unbelief," and she attributes its extravagance to "the modern malady—*Angst*." But if this were true, shouldn't we expect to find the same moral excess today? Victorian moral piety—so mindless, so fervent—may be traced, I think, to two less "metaphysical" causes. To begin with, the Victorians lacked a belief in the value of the self—they execrated the ego, they feared the flesh, they could find no importance in biological life; and thus when they cast about, after the disappearance of God, for something else that transcended mere life, they hit upon, inevitably, the abstraction of "others," and culture itself. And once this hallowing of "humanity" had taken place, it was deepened by the bourgeois fear of bestial anarchy—a fear shared by every intellectual of the age.

The London Heretics, 1870-1914,[3] by Warren Sylvester Smith, is a survey, in part, of the men and women who openly and militantly, with great hope and courage and dedication, attempted to effect this transfer (in Beatrice Webb's phrase) "of the emotion of self-sacrificing service from God to man"—of their organizations, so gallantly few in membership, so torn by schism; of their "rough-and-tumble platform exchanges" with the orthodox, succeeded at length "by a flood of cheap literature for sale in railway stations and public bookstalls"; of "the deep need of rebelling Victorians and Edwardians to come together for some formality of worship, even when the idea of God had become nebulous or non-existent"; of their attempts at communal living ("Fellowship," concluded a member of "Fellowship House"—"Fellowship is Hell"); "of the little uplift magazines of the period"; and of the trials for heresy and blasphemy in which several of the dissenting priests and secularists of the period were involved. The book also takes in Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy—"a heresy of the right," since it "rested on revelation"—and various species of New Christianity.

London Heretics is valuable as a careful and entertaining history of the late Victorian humanization of theology. Yet the discussion is seldom analytical, and what interpretation the book contains shines mostly from the quoted, acerbic comments of Beatrice Webb, who complained of "the naive belief of the most original and vigorous minds of the seventies and eighties that it was by Science, and by Science alone, that all human misery would be ultimately swept away," and who, even more harshly, said of Positivism that it was "an effort to make a religion out of nothing, a pitiful attempt by poor humanity to turn its head around and worship its tail." (Its *tail?*) Humanity, even "poor" humanity, is more than "nothing," but neither, alas,

[3] THE LONDON HERETICS, 1870-1914, by *Warren Sylvester Smith*. Dodd, Mead & Company. $6.95.

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is it a "Great Being," and there was indeed something pitiful in the Positivist creed. "To live for others, not for self, is the real happiness of each of us," said the Positivist Frederic Harrison, unconvincingly, and the lamb-like morality of the Victorians, their religion of love, of altruism, of "the good of the many," merely found in the London Positivists its most outspoken and fulsome voice. Carlyle receded farther and farther into the immature, the irresponsible past. "Cosmic Emotion," Harrison noted with a harrumph, "Pantheism . . . some Divine Mystery of the Universe": "The 'All' is a very big thing, but why am I to fall down before it?" So much for the vague "sublimities of the universe." Humanity is here, the time is now: "The main, daily business of Religion is to improve daily life, not to answer certain intellectual puzzles. . . ." And thus it happened that in Victorian England the metaphysical came to be not only ignored, but reprimanded. The "laws of nature" as the Positivists undertsood them were very different things from the "Laws of Nature" that Carlyle had hymned. They had no miracle in them, and though it certainly required valor (Carlyle's favorite virtue) to implement them on behalf of mankind, they were implemented out of mild, out of high-minded, out of reasonable and self-annihilating love.

Meanwhile, across London, so to speak, there were certain late Victorians of doubtful highness of mind and of still more doubtful love—and to at least one of whom "to talk morality" was "always an amusement." These form the subject of Rupert Croft-Cooke's *Feasting with Panthers.*[4] This book too is a survey of late Victorian heresies, the heresies of sexual eccentricity, of Swinburne, John Addington Symonds, and Oscar Wilde and of numerous men who crossed these writers' paths (and sometimes solicited there). The author examines, he claims, the lives of these men "as they affected their work"; but in truth there is scarcely any reference to the work, and the book is little more than diverting gossip.

The one valuable suggestion Croft-Cooke offers—that his subjects were "awed by their own notions of sin, infected with a puritanical belief in the evil of pleasure and the pleasures of evil"—is stretched far too wide, for, judging at least from the evidence of the book, only Oscar Wilde really merits this description—most of the others were timid, or morally troubled, Victorians who tried to live as best they could with their homosexuality or their interest in little girls. Only Wilde spoke of his affairs with "roughs" as feasting with panthers; and Wilde himself, as the author would no doubt agree, was hardly a panther, but a kind of intellectual and aesthetic peacock, sharply beaked and splendidly arrayed, strutting through the "perfect and poisonous" gardens of decadence.

[4] FEASTING WITH PANTHERS: A NEW CONSIDERATION OF SOME LATE VICTORIAN WRITERS, by *Rupert Croft-Cooke.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $6.50.

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Wilde's apostasy from Victorian morality seems to have sprung from a combination of the iconoclasm inherent in sexual idiosyncrasy and of the ennui of high-mindedness: "Tired of being on the heights," he wrote, "I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensations." It was therefore not a highly reasoned rebellion, and though Wilde is delightful, though he is audacious and brilliantly paradoxical, philosophically he is shallow and merely campy; and thus it is shocking to find Croft-Cooke dismissing Pater as a man who "had no philosophy"—who "if [he] had anything to say . . . never dared say it." For Pater's was the greatest heresy of all: philosophical aestheticism. In Pater, wonder is restored to Victorian literature—but wonder that is entirely aesthetic. No doubt there was Puritanism in his worship of beauty; still it was beauty he worshipped, and not mankind. Pater was the first Victorian of intellect to perceive that the value of life lies in life itself. One could complain that he perceived nothing else; but even so his discovery was one that really needed to be made. To him the great stream of "impressions" was itself a reason for living, the Universe a peacock with streaming feathers. Here was a "beatific vision" that had no reference to another world, for sublimity, to Pater, lay all in this world, and the pressure and hurt that Carlyle felt from intimations of eternity, Pater felt in the sheer pleasure of looking, in the worship of the eyes. In Pater there came, at least on the plane of philosophy, an end to Victorian self-delivery; for to this philosopher "the individual is to himself the measure of all things," a "complex medium of reception." Pater developed, in words from *Marius the Epicurean,* "a new form of the contemplative life." True, there was nothing metaphysical in this life—for looking, as Ortega said, "is the opposite of knowing: to look is to run the eyes over what is here, and knowing is to search for what is not here: the being of things." Nonetheless, behind Pater's aestheticism there lay a naked, ontological vision: that of a universe and of a self "continually vanishing," and real, and realized, only in the measure that they are intensely felt—Carlyle's whirling universe without God, without eternity.

In Carlyle, in Mill and Frederic Harrison, in Pater, we find the three basic attitudes of consciousness—the mystical, the moral, and the aesthetic—in almost exemplary purity and in almost chronological succession. Each attitude in its way is puritanical; each is courageous; each exaggerated. It was in 1915, with *The Rainbow,* that mysticism once again forcefully entered English literature. (By contrast, the earlier "mysticism" in Shaw is merely a borrowed construction.) And what has followed since Lawrence, since Yeats, since Virginia Woolf? The moral has again replaced the metaphysical; and as for the aesthetic, it has been routed by the crises of the times.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Why Read Criticism?

Two collections of criticism:[1] James Dickey's deals mainly with poets and poems, concludes with some reflections on being a poet, a giver of poetry readings, and a Southerner; Mark Schorer's deals wholly with novelists and the novel, but contains some reflections on the burdens of being a biographer and, with reference to his own fiction, on the mysteries of creativity. Both men are intelligent, serious readers of literature who write with admirable awareness that they are talking to someone about something—a poem, a novel—of interest. Both are modest and personal in their voices; as liberal sceptics with a distaste for absolutes they have no frantic messages to deliver or fancy schemes to ensnare us with, but speak from a lively sense of human possibilities and limitation. The question then is as always: why read criticism, particularly these mixed bags of selected essays, reviews, "notes on" this or that subject?

With respect to James Dickey, the question would be easy to answer if his essay on Edwin Arlington Robinson were representative of the rest of the book. By examining some passages from interestingly chosen poems he shows that Robinson is "not a writer of unremitting brilliance or a master of the more obvious technical virtuosities . . . [but] a poet of quick, tangential thrusts, of sallies and withdrawals, of fleeting hints and glimpsed implications." His conclusion is that Robinson is valuable for the way he created a body of poetry—Dickey terms it major poetry—"with devices usually thought to be unfruitful for the creative act—irresolution, abstraction, conjecture, a dry, nearly imageless mode of address that tends always toward the general without ever supplying the resolving judgment that we expect of generalization." The conclusion may not be startling but it seems accurate and possibly true to the extent that I'm moved to try one more assault on the *Collected Poems*. But the Robinson essay was written as an introduction to a volume of selections; and the remainder of Dickey's book—with the exception of some mildly interesting personal pieces at its end, plus some very brief remarks about five poems—consists of pasted together bits on contemporary poets. Many of them published formerly as *The Suspect in Poetry* by Robert Bly's Sixties Press, they were usually parts of omnibus reviews; in their present state, detached from whatever "context" the omnibus reviewer can give his remarks, the bits often look lonely indeed, surrounded by lots of blank space, as we finish the page and a half on Patchen, move to p. 73 (May Sarton in isolated splendor)

[1] BABEL TO BYZANTIUM, by *James Dickey*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95. THE WORLD WE IMAGINE, by *Mark Schorer*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $6.95.

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then get William Jay Smith for most of 74 and the top of 75, then Robert Penn Warren all the way to halfway down 77. A fair amount of shifting gears is called for. More bothersome is a recurrent lift toward exaltation of the poet under consideration:[2] Howard Nemerov's poems have "a sort of hopelessly involved acceptance and resignation . . . more of the truly tragic than most poetry which deliberately sets out in quest of tragedy." Herbert Read's poetry has "imaginative and right simplicity" which paired with "deep feeling for and of place" gives it "great spiritual and human resonance." "May Sarton is not a profoundly original writer, but she is a beautiful one . . . " "If sensuous delight and intellectual pleasure are among the important values conferred by poetry, we stand to gain more from [William Jay] Smith than from all but a handful of his contemporaries." Richard Eberhart is "one of the most authentically gifted and instinctively poetic minds of our time." And though we may not be familiar with the works of Margaret Tongue it turns out "Miss Tongue is able to enter the life of the thing she is writing about . . . and so comprehend it by an entirely original act of understanding"; so we are told to buy her book "not to read once, or to give to friends . . . but to live with." The kind of thing that might be said of Keats or Hopkins.

As perhaps these quotations suggest, the problem is what to do with all the moments in your old poetry reviews when you rose in noble praise of one singing bird after another and let no tongue go unheralded from babel to byzantium. It's not that Mr. Dickey praises all poets; he doesn't care for the Beats or Charles Olson or for artificial-academic poetry, Wintersian or otherwise. But we're asked to believe there is a world elsewhere, so that if Thom Gunn seems arid "we must look to writing in other languages than English for the creative joie de vivre that poetry must above all embody: to the poems of a thousand young Frenchmen full of sentimentalities at which Brooks and Warren might laugh" but which we, supposedly attuned to the larger simplicities, may gratefully receive. Leaving aside the thousand Frenchmen who can't be wrong, Dickey finds (in 1961) that Roethke is the best poet writing in English, calls his poems "simple, tragic, profound, and unutterably joyful" and three years later admires the "mindless, elemental quality in the sound of the voice, something primitive and animistic . . ." From the evidence of Dickey's own poems I should guess that he also admires Robert Bly and James Wright and the somnambulistic style generally. No wonder then that he is made uneasy by James Merrill and wishes that the poet's "lovers" "might cease to wander through parks and art galleries and public gardens as part of the scenery, but simply come into each other's presence and stare."

[2] At times it may be the press: "This is one of the three or four best books . . . that Wesleyan has brought out, and these four titles alone give that house the most exciting poetry list in current American publishing." Dickey's last three volumes were published by Wesleyan.

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What finally bothers me about these reviews is the example of a poet assiduously reviewing his contemporaries, wishing that Merrill would do this or Wilbur that (perhaps be more like Roethke and just *stare)* while he goes about publishing volumes of his own quite special brand of serious, mostly solemn, verse. Of course, there is no law against this procedure; Mr. Dickey has behind him, for one, the authority of Randall Jarrell. Sometimes too closely behind him: in the following question addressed to a Cummings poem—"Yet when you come on a passage like this, what can you feel but silence, gratitude, and rejoicing?"—it's clear whose very idiom has been apprehended. But Jarrell, besides his moments of rhetorical wonder, possessed also a fine sense of humor expressed in marvelously elaborate wisecracks, and a mind nurtured by the most wonderful combination of books we're all going to read but haven't quite got around to. From the evidence of this book, Dickey possesses neither of these qualities; thus the honest open-eyed simplicities begin to wear thin. It's revealing that by far the most interesting part of the reviews section is a dialogue between "A" and "B" on whether Randall Jarrell is a great poet or hardly a poet at all. The exaggerations and extravagances Dickey allows each voice, play off the other and result in more truth about Jarrell's poetry than could have been gotten from a less ambivalent review. I wish Dickey could have cultivated the double view more often with respect to the other poets. Without it, his vocabulary of praise and blame is predictable and repetitive.

At least one essay in Mark Schorer's selection from his writing of the last twenty years is a classic, to be encountered in every anthology of essays on fiction. "Technique as Discovery," (originally published in the first issue of this *Review*) the opening essay in the book, was presented to me in graduate school; I read and reread it always with satisfaction but also with the naive belief that if sufficiently absorbed it could somehow be used to unlock any novel and reveal the secret it held. Mr. Schorer isn't to blame for this: he tells us that "Technique is really what T. S. Eliot means by 'convention': any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action; . . . In this sense, everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself." And we remember Eliot's own claim in his preface to *The Sacred Wood* that he doesn't know at what point technique begins and where it ends. "Technique" may be every bit as inexpressible as "the lump of experience itself"; that is of course why new critics of the novel, often armed with equipment less sensitive than Schorer's own, have perpetrated so much pompous analysis of texture in the name of high principles. His own analysis is never pompous, though at its seemingly most high-powered (in "Fiction and the Analogical Matrix" where he examines the key metaphors of *Persuasion, Wuthering Heights* and *Middlemarch*) it threatens to

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turn mechanical: the hobby-horse comes suddenly to view. But usually Schorer's intelligence works in hand with a very engaging human flexibility; not always the necessary sign of truth, but always of an interesting temperament. For example I remember being intimidated by the following comparison between the techniques of H. G. Wells and of Gide:

> Wells, with his equally large blob of potential material, did not know how to cut it to the novel's taste; Gide cut, of course—in every possible direction. Gide and others. And those "cuts" are all the new techniques which modern fiction has given us.

Clearly Wells is the loser here. But now, twenty years later, is it permissible to call this judgment a matter of temperament and plan to reread Mr. Polly or Kipps sooner than *The Immoralist* or Lafcadio? Or vastly to prefer Ford's *Some Do Not* to that "best French Novel in the English language"—*The Good Soldier*—which Mr. Schorer admires for the way it is an "archetype of the processes of fiction" that "can also help all of us to read." I don't believe it helped me to read, certainly not if I can go back to Wells with pleasure afterwards. And in *Portraits From Life* Ford himself remembers or claims to remember Wyndham Lewis rushing into his office to tell him that he (Ford), Conrad, and James were done for—"You go to infinite pains to get in your convention . . . Progression d'effets . . . Time-shift . . . And what for? What in Heaven's name for . . . Verisimilitude—that's what you want to get with all your wheezy efforts . . ."—and that what audiences wanted instead were loud performances by a narrator who resembled Wyndham Lewis. Or perhaps it was to be Norman Mailer or Anthony Burgess.

If we take Mr. Schorer's remarks about technique, then, as descriptive of certain procedures and temperaments in the novels and novelists he admires we can better understand, if not fully sympathize with, his largely unqualified respect for Truman Capote, Carson McCullers and Katherine Anne Porter (the last of whom, fine as she is, could surely survive some questionings). The best critical essays in the book in my judgment are about novels *(Moll Flanders, Emma, Women in Love)* which while they surely abide our questions about "technique" (and what other questions, given Eliot's and Schorer's spacious definition of it, could they abide?) do so in a wholly natural and unobtrusive way: we feel that Schorer is writing about Defoe or Jane Austen or Lawrence as much as the "formed substance" of a particular novel. When he says about *Women in Love* that

> The intention . . . is so tremendous, so central to our lives, that we must for our own sakes make an effort to tolerate it. I say tolerate for the reason that I have known almost no readers who, on *first* reading, did not find it either opaque beyond endurance, or tiresome, or revolting. . . .

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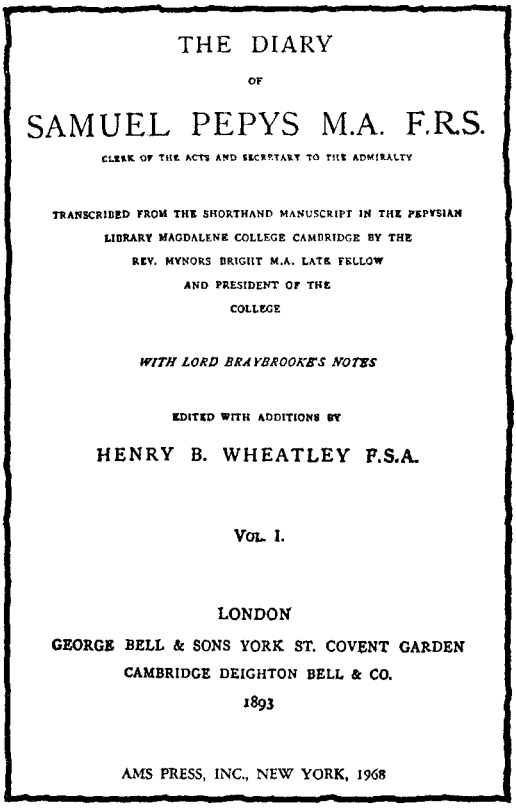
AN ESSENTIAL ACQUISITION



THE DIARY

OF

SAMUEL PEPYS M.A. F.R.S.

CLERK OF THE ACTS AND SECRETARY TO THE ADMIRALTY

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WITH LORD BRAYBROOKE'S NOTES

EDITED WITH ADDITIONS BY

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and suggests that the novel is difficult to judge because we're asked repeatedly "to love Lawrence the man in order to accept Lawrence the novelist," the insight is more than temperamental. If you don't have some trouble with *Women In Love* you're not reading the book right—that is simply true; and whatever insights Schorer has into the technique of *Emma* or *Moll Flanders* are equally at the service of human truth about ourselves as readers. After he has pointed out how, as Emma is diminished in the social scene of the novel she grows in its moral scheme, he adds a sentence, in momentary wonder—"It is very beautiful." The "it" refers to no less than that technique which it's impossible to delimit in respect to anything called content, or what Jane Austen is *saying*. And the sentence "It is very beautiful" feels remarkably unlimp because of the sentences before it; Schorer develops his vocabulary by attending to the particular book in question, so his critical procedures are a good deal more secure than those of a more naked responder like James Dickey. But then, Schorer avoids lyric poems as totally as Dickey does novels; undoubtedly there's more to work out from and dig into when your subject is *Emma* rather than Brother Antoninus.

For all his solid writing about particular novels, what surprised and engaged me most were two essays in which Schorer's own novelistic technique is strongly in play, and where exactly what the technique "discovers" is at once perfectly clear and perfectly impossible to sum up in handy capsule form. The shorter of the two pieces, called "Two Houses, Two Ways: The Florentine Villas of Lewis and Lawrence," invites us on a tour of the houses as it evokes the different spirits of two places and attempts to imagine what Lewis or Lawrence saw in those late days. For example, of Lewis: "He could look, if he wished, straight north to Settignano, and on clear days, with ordinary field glasses, would probably have been able to pick out the clock tower among the cypresses of I Tatti, the house of his old friend Bernard Berenson." And Schorer, his fictional self standing in Lewis' tower, proceeds to remember that in Lewis' last novel a fake connoisseur is given a remark which supposedly, when uttered by the real Berenson, once caused Lewis to lose his temper at an I Tatti dinner. This strikes off further associations in Schorer's mind, taking him by the end of the paragraph to the following:

> And, in fact, as one tries to see clearly through all that faintly tinted glass, one's emotions there in Lewis's tower, his last writing place, is almost entirely the emotion of pathos; for it is impossible not to juxtapose the sentimental coziness of entirely fabricated feeling that characterizes the end of his last novel with the desperation of the end of his life there in La Costa: the loneliness, the self-reproach, the shadowed isolation amidst the garish splendor, the desperate shame that kept him from people, especially his true friends, and then always the destructive forgetting.

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As is the case with Lawrence, there is no lesson to be learned from contemplating these final places; or no more or less of a one than that both writers were a long way from Sauk Centre, Minn. and Nottinghamshire; but through the authority of style the reader discovers something he hadn't seen before. As he does in the long hundred-page narrative "Some Relationships" which attempts to impose some form or rhythm on the "lump of experience" called, respectively, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. The narrative contains no striking literary criticism nor, as far as I know, new facts of biography; all the pleasure is in the technique with which Schorer changes the focus of attention, takes a tone toward, say, Hemingway's patronizing of Fitzgerald; is careful not to use his own wit to score points off the dead writers. The result is a superb bringing of them back to life; and Schorer's final questioning reflection about whether these lives taken together don't share some "fated symmetry" can be seriously entertained only because of the symmetry his own art of telling has given them. In the process of which the world *we* imagine has been enlarged.

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